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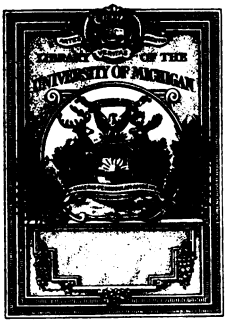

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T'OTHER DEAR CHARMER

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T'OTHER

DEAR CHARMER

BY

HELEN MATHERS

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF NO. 13," "MY JO, JOHN," ETC.

NEW YORK

LOVELL, CORYELL & COMPANY

43, 45 AND 47 EAST TENTH STREET

1892

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T'OTHER DEAR CHARMER.

CHAPTER I.

"Yes, kind sir, I am within,
Softly do I sit and spin."

It flaunted its charming, fragrant head over the wall, crying out as plainly as a white rose may speak, "Pick me if you can!" but its real charm in the gazer's eyes lay in its hanging just out of his reach, and in its suggestion of the shade and coolness of the garden in which it grew.

He was tired and hot and hungry. The walk that had seemed but a trifle to him, when he started in such splendid condition and bounding spirits that morning, had be-

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come in the heat of the sun a very much longer one than he had expected, and he longed for a draught of cider to quench his thirst, and a mouthful of bread and cheese with which to appease a very respectable appetite.

But hotels do not flourish on that wild and picturesque way that lies between Seamouth and Regis, and which perhaps may measure five miles as the crow flies, but is far longer to the pedestrian, whose progress through that strange convulsion of nature known as the Landslip is necessarily difficult and slow.

At once awe-inspiring and beautiful is this ravine of over two hundred feet in depth, formed by the sinking of an immense tract of land that descended with such regularity and precision towards the sea as to carry with it fields whose surfaces are now at the bottom of the cliff, and thrown into a slanting position instead of being level as before.

Great columnar masses, resembling vast pinnacles or towers of chalk, are in some

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places left standing, whilst the more broken and crushed parts have sunk around them, and immense banks of flint and broken rock rise in hillocks on every side, the ground being rent and scored in seams many feet wide and deep.

And over this terrific manifestation of Nature in a rage, she had herself drawn a mantle of green loveliness, covering up tenderly the ravages she had made, planting and sowing at her own sweet will, till now, after fifty years, the scene is exquisite, even to enchantment, and none who have ever looked upon it could rest until they have looked again.

Hugh Valentine knew it all by heart, and for very love of it had come that way, instead of by the convenient road that ran straight away on the other side of the cliff, and which a young man in such haste as he, should naturally have taken that morning.

Indeed, even while he glanced up at that white rose, he knew himself to be considerably behind time where he was expected, yet with

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all a man's obstinacy he lingered, wanting the flower, of course, since he could not get it, and curious too, for how came this descendant of many a blooming generation to be growing close to a brand-new, ugly brick wall, that he was quite positive had not been here when last he had crossed the Slip? He remembered the cottage well enough, with its back to the cliff, and a considerable garden reclaimed from the broken-up ground around, but the wall—its newness showing in startling contrast against the age of its picturesquely beautiful surroundings, and making a jarring note of discord in the scene, who had built it, and what was the treasure within it that required such jealous keeping?

The spot was so lonely, that, save for the dwellers in it, or a chance pedestrian, no one need ever know of its existence, and surely to such a place as this might steal some

> "Youthful hermitess,
> Beauteous in the wilderness."

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and so altogether escape the echoes of the wicked world.

"Here goes," said Hugh, as he began to pile up stones against the wall. "I wonder how the mysterious one goes out or in? Ha! A little postern door that locks inside, and has no bell," and he proceeded to mount the piled-up cairn; but with that curious optical illusion from which most people suffer in calculating heights, he found himself still too far from the top of the wall to look over it, though the rose was now easily within his grasp.

Confidently enough he stretched a covetous hand, only to have it promptly pounced upon, dragged downwards, and held in a warm firm grasp that he tried in vain to shake off, the more so as his captor's other hand came to the aid of its fellow, and seized his wrist.

For a moment, irritation slew his sense of humour, and he only felt acutely that there was a fool on one side of the wall, and somebody laughing at him on the other, for he heard

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a most distinct chuckle, feminine, of course, since who but a woman would be so maliciously quick to take advantage of his folly? Meanwhile his bondage hurt confoundedly, for bones do not usually adapt themselves easily to the angles of stone walls, and very soon patience forsook him, and he cried out savagely:

"Do you want to break my arm, *you-over-there?*"

You-over-there let go of him with such suddenness that he lost his balance on the top of the stones, and rolled over into soft dust on his back. The accident restored his good temper, and he laughed aloud, being echoed softly, as he thought, by the sharp person on the other side of the wall, whom he had now made up his mind to see, or perish.

"Perhaps she'll go for me with a rake or a shovel, the moment my head appears," he soliloquised, as he fetched and carried more stones. "Any way, I'll risk it."

His blue eyes—blue as the diamond-strewn

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sea below—lit up, and, fired by the manly resolve to get his own way that is the most deeply rooted of all instincts in the male breast, his spirits rose to buoyancy as he placed the last stone in position, and then—he might have expected as much, knowing the nature of women—his pride of victory was snatched from him, for whirling over the wall came the white rose, giving his forehead a spiteful little scratch as it struck him. He picked it out of the dust unthankfully, unmollified even by its sweet scent; then looked up quickly and keenly at the top of the wall as if he expected to see the hand that flung it—not an old one he dared swear—the fling was too impulsive for that, and old women were not so mischievous as to spoil a young man's enterprise in such fashion, or so coquettish as to beckon him in without saying a single word. And yet, who but a red-cheeked Devonshire peasant was likely to be found in a cottage perched on a cleft of a landslip in such a position as only people tired of their lives could surely

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be found to occupy? The thought checked his ardour. He was rather long in adjusting the rose in the belt that did duty for a button-hole, and possibly his silence bred curiosity in the breast on the other side of the wall, and curiosity begot active measures for gratifying the same; but so it was, that when his head suddenly topped the wall, it almost came into collision with the ascending face of a laughing, mischievous tom-boy.

A tom-boy—that was his first impression of her, as, with a stifled cry and laugh in one the girl, scrambling down from some piled-up flower-pots, lost her footing, and plumped into the lap of a spreading cabbage with considerably more emphasis than grace, whence she looked up at him with soft and decidedly mischievous brown eyes.

She wore a dainty, frilled apron and kerchief of muslin over a lavender cotton, French in style and in cut, and her face was French, too, with its crown of fine dark curls and brunette tinting of eye, and brow, and lips.

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"You are a very tall man," she said, with an admiring air, "yours is the first hand I did ever see come over the wall. But you was a thief" (she shook her head gravely), "and did not deserve that I should give you the rose." She stopped abruptly, and a look of distress and even fear overspread her features. "I did forget," she said, breathlessly; "you did startle me, and I did forget. I have given my *parole* not to speak to nobody while M. le Docteur is away, and I have broken it," and she turned as if to fly.

"But *having* broken it," said the young man, persuasively, and, it must be added, thirstily, "you can't mend it again, can you? So you must not run away. One may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

"Oh, no," she said, with tears in her eyes; "if one does do wrong, and repents—but when your hand did come over the wall, I said to myself, 'It is M. le Docteur, and I will play him one trick,' for all day I have been in one wicked mood."

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"Your intentions were all right," he said, consolingly, "and who could blame you because I—no, I mean the doctor—turned out to be somebody else. And really I'm very much obliged to you for that rose," he said, in the pleasant tone that he reserved for women; and pleasant enough he looked, with the sun touching his fair head and face, "and I'm just coming over to thank you for being so kind."

"No, no," she cried, throwing out her hands, and showing signs of precipitate departure, but he had already drawn himself up by his hands to the top of the wall, and in another moment he was beside her.

She changed colour, and retreated as he advanced.

"Why did you give me the rose?" he said, in his well-bred, masterful voice, "if you didn't mean me to come over and thank you for it?"

"Céléstine will see you," she said, glancing back at the distant cottage, half hidden in shrubs. "She will tell M. le Docteur when

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he does come home. You must climb yourself back again, or I shall be scolded dreadful." But her brown eyes said, "Stay," and he stood his ground, keeping a sharp look-out the while for Céléstine.

"I am so tired," he said, putting on as wornout and pitiful an air as his splendid condition permitted; "and it is so cool and pleasant here. May I not sit down a little while and rest?"

A rustic summer-house stood by, with a bench in it, and a table, set sideways and out of the eye of the house, and he made straight for the little retreat, drawing the girl with him, who might as well have resisted a tidal wave that swept her in its course, so that she found herself seated beside him almost before she was aware.

"What a cruel little hand," he said, looking down at the one lying on her knee; "and your thimble hurt me" (he assumed a look of agony), "and if you hadn't been as merciful as you are strong, I should be your prisoner now."

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"But I did take two to you," she said, spreading out her ten fingers.

"And why did you?" he said, his eyes resting on her little soft dark face. "When you have so many roses, why should you hinder my having that one?"

She looked at him, and then, provoked into sudden hilarity, threw her apron over her head, and burst into a fit of laughter, in which he joined heartily.

"Céléstine is deaf," he said, when they came out of it, or you never would have let me make all that noise. And as you asked me in—you *did*, you know" (as she shook the ruffled head that emerged from the apron) —"and it's such a thirsty day, might I beg for just a drink of water?"

His blue eyes said "cider" as plain as they could speak.

"Vatter?" she said, incredulously, "I never did know a man yet who did drink vatter. But good cider"—she paused, her hospitable instincts suddenly checked by

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propriety, and looked at him dubiously, receiving, however, so much encouragement that she ran nimbly off, showing the trimmest feet and ankles in the world.

"What a little duck," said the young man aloud, thinking tenderly of her as a nectar-bearing machine, then wondered how on earth came this young French girl here?"

Who was she? And what authority over her had the evidently dreaded "M. le Docteur"?

Then he saw her coming, a jug and glass in one hand, a plate of bread and cheese—real Devonshire blue cheese—in the other.

"*Voilà!*" she said, as she set her burden on the table, "it is now the time for my *déjeuner*, so I did tell Céléstine I would eat it out here. Begin!" she cried, and clapped her hands for pleasure, and danced for joy as he took a deep draught of the cider, coming up smiling after it, like some thirsty plant rejoicing in August rains.

"Eat," she said, when they had exchanged

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glances of satisfaction, and it was so plainly evident that nothing could please her better, that he set to immediately.

"But where is yours?" he said, remorsefully, after his first mouthful, "let's go halves?"

"No," she said, "I am not ever hungry here"—she shook her head sadly—"it is always so *triste*, and I should have been glad," she added, with a blush, "to see *anybody* come over the wall!"

Her words were bold, yet she glanced at him timidly (where was now the hoyden of a few minutes ago?), and there was something helpless and soft in her beauty that appealed irresistibly to his manliness, for, at heart, all men love the pretty fools who draw forth their strength and masterfulness to the full.

And then he began to wonder what was her name? Now this curiosity of most people about other people's names has always been something that I never could understand. Whether they meet in society or in the desert,

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the first thing to be got at is—each other's names. What does your name matter? There is the person, there is you, the badge that has been artificially attached to you in no way affects your personality, so why bother about it? Yet most people do.

"You are very kind to me, Marie," said the young man presently.

"I am not Marie," she said, quite simply; "I am Felida."

He repeated the name after her.

"It is like you," he said, and longed for more.

"And you," she said, no less curious than he, "how do you call yourself?"

"Hugh Valentine—at your service—an artist, staying at Regis, and now on my way to pay a—a morning call at Seamouth. Do you like pictures?" he added quickly.

"Yes," she said wistfully, "but I do never see any—not never."

"I often make sketches of the Slip," he said, then paused, and coloured up, checking the words he had meant to say.

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"I do not know your Slip, and I do not see anything, not anything at all," she said sadly. "I did give my *parole* too that I would not look over the wall,"—she blushed and hung her head, then drew a bit of embroidery out of her pocket, and began to sew as she spoke. She made a restful figure, with grace in its every line, as she leaned her back against the entrance of the arbour.

"Is Monsieur le Docteur your husband?" said Hugh, boldly.

She glanced down suddenly at her hand as if looking for something, and a look of trouble, almost of confusion, overspread the girl's face; she put up her hand as if to hide it, and half turned away.

"And do you live here always?" pursued the unabashed Hugh.

"No," she said, "it will be only for a little while. How long will I have been here, weeks or months?" She bent her brows as if in puzzled thought, then stamped her foot impatiently, as if such puzzling angered her.

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"And do you *never* go out?" he said.

"Never," her face clouded to almost sullenness, "never to the outside of the garden, and I do love the sea." A curious look as of awakened memory came into her eyes. "But there is only my needlework and Célestine."

"Your home is in France," he said, as one stating a fact; but this time she would not answer, and, thinking that her averted figure preserved a certain air of offence, he began to speak of the picturesque beauty of the Landslip, and the many quaintnesses of the little old town from which he had come a few hours before.

He was startled to find that she did not even know its name. Did she even know she was in Devonshire? he wondered. Was there not something of the irresponsibility of a child in her face and manner? Gay, *légère*, she seemed to bend to every passing influence without thought, and gave him the idea of a being full of surprises.

"Good-bye," he said, suddenly standing

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up, "and do you know that I have made a discovery? Célestine is lame as well as deaf, and it is only M. le Docteur whom you fear. And thank you"—he pressed her little hand, and looked as if he would have added more, then mounted the flower-pots, and was over the wall and out of sight in a twinkling.

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CHAPTER II.

"Where hae ye been, my dear brither,
Sae late o' coming in?"
"I hae been at the schule, sister,
Learning young clerks to sing."

THE Bow House was crammed, filled to overflowing with boys and girls, servants and children, with dogs that barked, birds that shrieked, and rival tradesmen who blocked the gangway, and energetically competed with each other for an interview with the mistress of the house.

That lady was in the act of descending the stairs at the moment of Hugh Valentine's appearance, but as a fat little grocer—too eager suppliant for custom—actually dashed up a few steps to meet her, she turned incontinently and fled, with an expression on her

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countenance that boded little success to her pursuer.

"Where is Dosia?" said the young man to a little maid running past with a puppy tightly clutched in her arms, who was rolling his eyes about wildly in search of escape.

But the little maid—Dosia's sister, clearly enough, by her eyes—didn't know.

"Isn't he a *sweet* little puppy?" she added, holding him up to the young man's inspection, an opportunity instantly seized by the pup to jump out of her arms, and draw her promptly after him in full chase.

"Where's Dosia?" he inquired next, of a solemn-faced boy who was sliding down the banisters, and no satisfactory reply being forthcoming, the cry of "Where's *Dosia?*" was passed on from mouth to mouth, till in every chamber from attic to cellar the name of Dosia resounded.

But she was not in the house, nor, though half-a-dozen boys and girls helped to look, was she in the garden either, nor in the sta-

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bles, nor in the wash-house, nor the piggery, though the young Trehernes conscientiously explored all of these places in turn.

Now, being a man, this difficulty in finding the young woman, though he had lingered half a day on his road to Seamouth, whetted Hugh's desire so greatly to behold her, that when, having left all his little fellow-toilers behind, he climbed to an orchard at the top of a hill behind the kitchen-garden, and saw her walking under the trees towards him, his heart actually leaped for joy.

It is been said that the devil himself is no judge of a horse in harness, or of a woman in her war-paint, but if Hugh had ever thought for a moment that Dosia's mantua-maker, or hairdresser, or jeweller had given a fictitious value to her charms in town, the sight of her as she came through the calm, low, level light of the summer evening in her simple white gown, disabused his mind of such an idea for all time.

She was angry with him, offended at his

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long tarrying on the road, and the attitude of waiting is one that no girl of spirit can fill with grace and comfort, yet wishful as she was to mark her displeasure, so natural was she, and so true and warm beat her heart beneath all its veneer of worldliness, that her eyes gave him welcome, and the blush in her face was almost a caress as he stooped his head over her slender wrist and kissed it.

Perhaps both were thinking that his greeting would have been differently applied if in town she had said, "Yes," instead of "Wait."

"Where is the *enfant terrible?*" he said, looking round anxiously for his old, or rather his young but terrible enemy, Onny, that small detective, that ruthless nipper-in-the-bud of Dosia's flirtations, who would escape from the schoolroom in town to spoil Hugh's opportunities, accompany them in their walks abroad, and refuse even fabulous bribes to leave them.

"He did not know you were coming," said

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Dosia, laughing, "or he would never have deserted his post."

"Can't you give him a hint to be off duty a bit now we are in the country?" said Hugh ruefully. "That cherub will have an awful lot to answer for some day. He ruined poor Mademoiselle's chances by obtruding himself at a delicate moment——"

"And are you afraid of his ruining mine, sir?" said Dosia saucily.

"If you look at me again like that, Dosia, I'll kiss you," said Hugh.

"Isn't it a dear old place?" said Dosia hurriedly. "But you have probably seen it before, as you come every year to Regis."

"Yes, I know it," he said, as they turned and strolled along side by side, "but never have I seen it and its six bow-windows so crammed with humanity as they are now! How many hundreds of brothers and sisters have you?"

"I hardly know," she said, stopping to turn alarmed eyes upon his. "In town, where

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we are for the greater part of the year, I only see them in instalments, but every time we come here, it strikes me there are two or three fresh ones! And they are not nearly *all* home from school yet! I do believe it's the only house dad knows of that would take us all in," she went on, "and *that's* why he comes every year, and because he doesn't believe in any sea-air that has not a smack of fish in it! No doubt you have already discovered that peculiarity of Seamouth?"

"Yes. We haven't got it at Regis, and yet the two places are so close to each other——"

"Regis looks down upon us," said Dosia, with airy scorn. "We have no Cobb wall—no pretence at a harbour, and only a palpable one at a library, and no society! But fortunately we of the Bow House are not dependent for that on our neighbours."

Hugh laughed.

"Let us sit down," he said. "There's an awfully pretty view from this corner," and

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they did sit down, and he looked at her, while she looked at the sea.

"Mr. Valentine——" she said.

"Hugh," he corrected.

"Hugh, don't you feel like Carraway Bones in *Turned Up?*"

"No. Why?"

"Because I shall never again see any two people sitting on a rustic seat without thinking of Carraway Bones beside a pretty girl, drenched to the skin, saying, 'Brandy *inside* —water out.' How I laughed that night. It makes me ill now to think of him."

"How long have I been Mr. Valentine?" said Hugh thoughtfully.

"Oh! a long while. When a man takes twenty-four hours to get over the four miles that separate him from——"

"Five," put in Hugh.

Dosia turned full round and looked at the young man, then looked again and frowned as at something that displeased her.

"Hugh," she said, "how—how dreadfully fair you are!"

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"Dosia," he said, "how dreadfully, *dreadfully* fair you are!"

"It's such a pity," said the girl, in an accent of alert concern. "I've had my misgivings before—but now I'm *sure* of it. We are two regular gingers together!"

"It's only too true," acquiesced Hugh.

"When I first met you," went on Dosia, still surveying him with dolorous eyes, "I thought you were dark, quite dark. To be sure the room was almost pitchy. Lady B—— always draws all her curtains, and lights her smallest candles on a glorious summer's afternoon, and one day I actually sat down on a most respectable old gentleman's knee, thinking he was a chair. But you gave me the *impression* of being a dark man, and afterwards—you know, it's never really light in town, and—and——"

"You are disappointed, Dosia," said Hugh, "and to tell you the truth, I thought you were quite dark too, and—and——"

"It's my wretched hair," said Dosia de-

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jectedly, putting up a slim hand to a curling, waving mass piled to perfection above her head. "It's *quite* brown in the shade, and downright fair in the sun! And green eyes are always brown or black in the dark—and that's how it all happened," she added, in a lamentable voice.

"What happened?" said Hugh, leaning forward to look at her.

"Oh! nothing!" And Dosia turned one of those beautiful *nuques*, that seem natural to fair-haired women, upon him, forcing him to think, by sheer force of contrast, upon a smart little dark head seen for the first time that day.

"*What* happened?" said Hugh insistently, and encroaching very considerably on her share of the seat.

"Come and see the rose-garden!" she said, starting up and gliding away with great rapidity over the grass. "Isn't it odd—it's on the other side of the house—across the road!"

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"Dosia," said Hugh, putting his hand compellingly through her arm, "a civil question requires a civil answer. You haven't left school long enough to forget *that*."

Dosia turned and looked at him with those green eyes of hers that had all the change, and life, and sparkle of the sea, and said:

"If you had come earlier in the day, Hugh, I might have answered, but I shan't now! Here comes the Boss," she added, as a bright little terrier rushed towards them, heading a *posse* of young Trehernes, who were still searching for Dosia, but among them, to Hugh's great relief, Onny was not to be seen.

And then they all went down together, losing the greater part of their escort on the way, and falling in with gentle Mrs. Treherne, who bade the young man welcome, then instantly disappeared at some urgent domestic call.

The young folks crossed the road, passing through a gate in the railings that gave on to a square of emerald green turf and three sides

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of roses, all of the choicer kinds, and full of the warm breath of the summer that had evidently come to stay, after the good old-fashioned style.

A few rocking-chairs were about, the formal place seemed, in its beautiful order, a marked contrast to the red-brick house opposite, out of which superabundant life seemed to flow at every window, and into whose interior, especially on the ground floor, those outside could look easily, seeing all that passed within.

"Only think, Dosia," said Hugh, when she had given him a rose, but without the look he wanted more than the rose, "how easy for me to come here at night and peep at you —perhaps see you in the lamplight talking to some other man, for I am sure the blinds are never pulled down, by night or day. And it is a little dangerous, too, if anyone from outside bore someone in your house a grudge."

Dosia laughed.

"We are an institution in the place," she

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said, "as you will see when the House is up, and father comes down. Every woman ducks a courtesy, and every man touches his hat—I used to miss these tokens of respect very much when I first went to town."

"But you got used to seeing people on their knees instead," said Hugh drily; "you know there is compensation in everything!"

"Come and have some tea," said Dosia; "you must want it. By the way, what time did you start from Regis?—after lunch, of course?"

Hugh coloured, but he looked the girl squarely in the face.

"No—before lunch."

"Really?"

Dosia raised her brows—dark, like her eyelashes—and looked at him inquiringly.

"Then you must be frightfully hungry!" she said.

"No; I—I got something on the road."

Now what was there to hinder this young man from telling right out his small adven-

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ture of the morning? I know not, unless it be the rooted disinclination of a man to even mention one petticoat to another.

"I didn't know there were any inns on the Landslip!" said Dosia, with a perceptible change in her voice, since she had not studied Hugh's physiognomy and character for nothing, but he was unlatching the gate for her to pass out, and made no reply.

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CHAPTER III.

"Hey ninnie nonnie! but love be bonnie
A little while when it is new;
But when it's auld, it grows mair cauld,
And fades awa' like morning dew."

"WHO is she?"

Mr. Bellew, putting the question across the breakfast-table to Hugh, found that young gentleman disingenuous when he inquired to whom the question referred.

"I said, 'Who *is* she?,'" repeated Mr. Bellew, and two pretty girls, just then slipping through the open windows on to the lawn, looked over their shoulders laughingly before they vanished.

"Can't one go over to Seamouth once in a way without getting chaffed?" said Hugh, with some irritation.

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"You have been over three times in one week," said Mr. Bellew drily, "and you are going over again to-day. During the previous years you have been here, a couple of visits sufficed."

"Well?" said Hugh, selecting a cigar carefully.

"I say who *is* she?" said the old gentleman testily, and getting up from the table.

"Christian name, Dosia; surname, Treherne. A town young lady, whose father originally hailed from Cornwall."

"I should think so. How could he come from anywhere else? And how he can live in that hole, London, beats me. Member for Mucklebury, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"And never visits anybody hereabouts. We've all tried to be sociable with him, but he won't. I gave up trying many years ago. Has over a hundred children, hasn't he?"

"No—I don't think I've seen more than twenty—and 'pon my word, I don't think there

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can be so many as that, as Dosia is the eldest, and she is only eighteen."

"H'm," said Mr. Bellew, frowning, "and it's a settled thing?"

"Not till she settles it," and Mr. Bellew looked quickly at the young man, for the tone was not exactly that of a prospectively jubilant and successful lover.

His uncle nodded, looking out at the pleasant garden and the sunlit sea beyond.

"She is dark, of course?" he said, without turning. "You see I know your taste."

"No—as fair as I am."

"What! to act as extinguishers to one another? If she values her appearance she'll send you packing. My dear boy, in common justice to that magnificent skin and hair of yours, you should have selected a sooty-haired person, and she should have done the same; but probably she'll marry you, and select him —*after*," added the old man cynically.

"Dosia is a good girl, sir," said Hugh warmly; "she is more country than town-

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bred, or she would not be the wife for me."

"What does a boy like you want with a wife?" growled Mr. Bellew; "ten years hence would be time enough. Look at me! ain't I happy enough? And *I* never married."

"No, sir. I have observed that if a man *does* manage to keep single till he is forty—all temptations and blandishments notwithstanding—he usually manages to be a bachelor to the end."

"Yes," said Mr. Bellew, with a reminiscent sigh, "but it wants a good deal of pluck and determination to keep out of the toils, I promise you. Think it over seriously, my boy, and don't be in a hurry; you're both young, and there's plenty of time. And if you find you've made a mistake, my boy," he added, putting his hand affectionately on the young man's shoulder, "don't be afraid to own it, and go back on your tracks—it's far manlier than to blunder on, and spoil two lives. When a man finds he has made a mistake in business, he doesn't feel it his duty to

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go on with it to ultimate ruin—he draws back, loses something, but not all; and why, when it's a case of life-long bankruptcy in happiness to two people, should it be a crime in either of them to change their minds?"

Hugh flushed angrily, sensible though he was of his uncle's good intentions.

"You must think me a cold lover enough, sir, to say that," he said indignantly; "but it is not I who am hanging back—it is——" but he walked off without finishing the sentence, returning almost immediately to say good-bye before starting.

"How do you go?" said Mr. Bellew.

It was the last day of July—a cloudless, royal summer day, promising great heat at noon—and Hugh looked up at the sky and down at the sea, as if undecided. A sailing-boat would slip round the cliff to Seamouth in no time; a horse would carry him by the road well ahead of the midday heat; yet, without any direct prompting of his will, Hugh said:

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"I shall walk across the Slip."

Mr. Bellew shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, good-bye," he said, "make my respects to the young lady, and say I shall come over to see her when I hear Diogenes has arrived."

"And I devoutly hope the young lady *has* changed her mind," he thought, as he watched the stalwart figure down the road that wound outside the Cliff house to the town, "anyway he doesn't seem very keen about it —or rather her. Probably, now she has bagged her game, she has ceased to flatter him—and flattery's sauce for the goose, sauce for the gander, and it's flattery, not love, that makes the world go round."

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CHAPTER IV.

"Leave me not unto a Spaniard,
You alone enjoy my heart;
I am lovely, young and tender,
Love is likewise my desert."

IT is an article of the average man's creed, that when ruffled by one woman, he shall go to another for consolation, and possibly, though Hugh did not know it, he was only obeying his man's nature, when, vaguely irritated by Dosia, he set out on his walk across the Landslip, knowing that the little French girl lay directly in his path.

When he had got well on his way, and clean out of sight of Regis, he began to walk more slowly, and to think closely and earnestly, trying to trace to its commencement the cloud

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that had come between him and Dosia. He had noticed a change in her that first evening at Seamouth, and in some slight, chill, intangible way, well-known to women who desire to keep their lovers in check and stem the flood-tide of their passion, she had gradually made herself remote and even inaccessible to him, so that he had felt shut out into the cold without knowing the reason why.

And he had been too proud to brush that coldness by, to take her in his arms, to kiss her, even to threaten to shake her, if she would not tell him the reason why she had changed—why, from being the most spontaneous, delightful companion in the world, she had become at once *genée* and polite, an odious mixture of manners that did not become her in the least, and almost entirely deprived her of charm.

For with Dosia the word and the act always went together, and in her likes and dislikes she knew no moderation, so that she had at least a dozen enemies for every friend she

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possessed; but she was staunch, she was true, and, that rarest thing in a woman, constant where once her feelings were engaged.

He had studied female nature too well not to know the value of such qualities, and if she were lovely too with the promise of a fair fresh spring morning, did such charming looks lessen her value, even though a man does not choose a wife for her complexion, but for her heart; at least, if he be a man of the character of Hugh Valentine. And now she had changed, she had even brought Onny into the conspiracy of never leaving them alone together, but had apparently given him a special retainer never to quit her when in his company, so that the young man's visits to Seamouth were failures, and resulted in much exacerbation of spirit and searching inquiry into the depths of his soul as to whether he had ever really loved the provoking creature at all.

But a sight of Dosia, as he caught her one day romping with the boys, her April face,

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full of sunshine and goodness, as blithe and merry as the youngest of them all, made his heart beat fast, and convinced him that the dethroning of her would not be so easy a task as he had supposed.

Nevertheless, when she continued the ways that he mentally characterised as "aggravating," she tried his temper severely, almost to the point of giving her that shaking which she richly deserved, and would secretly have loved to get.

He said to himself this morning that he would not stand any more nonsense, but have it out with her that very day, and if she were still "aggravating," then this should be his last—his very last walk to Seamouth this summer.

And having settled this matter to his satisfaction, he covered the ground with so much vigour that almost before he knew himself near, beheld the stone wall, above which showed to-day no mere common Devonshire white rose, but, as he saw when he came

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nearer, a deep crimson one, freshly cut from its stalk, and looking as innocent as if one of Eve's daughters had not put it expressly there for his temptation.

He paused, and smiling, looked up; and at the moment a gay voice within commenced to sing a French chansonette;

"Tu t'en repentiras, Colin,
Tu t'en repentiras;
Car si tu prends une femme, Colin,
Tu t'en repentira."

He began to laugh softly, then checked himself and turned abruptly away, thinking, with a little pang, of her hospitality, and how he had promised to show her his sketches, paused, shook his head again, and walked determinedly away. But as he passed the little door in the wall, it opened suddenly as if of itself, and he saw the garden and empty summer-house, and yes, just a fold of white cambric beyond the door; and what could a man do but step inside and look behind it?

"Felida!" he exclaimed, at seeing her

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squeezed into a mere nothing against the wall, and looking at him with soft, dark eyes of guilt, while with her apron she partly hid her face, "what are you doing there?"

"I did steal the key," she said, "and I have come out, too, three times, and I did look up the way and down, but I did never see you anywheres—not never!"

She shook her dark head reproachfully, and dropped her apron to let him take her little hand with the thimble on it, and he noticed what a useful, work-a-day thimble it was, by no means assumed for play.

"How did you get the key?" he said severely, as she thought, and the colour faded a little in her olive cheeks as she stole out from behind the door.

"I did steal it from Céléstine—and I do fear it was a wicked thought of my heart—out of her pocket while she was asleep, and I did put another in its place, and every morning she looks at them and nods her head—so—and does think I am all safe; and

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she is lame—she stirs never from the *coin du feu*," she added, a little shamefacedly, "so she will not catch me ever."

"And are you not afraid M. le Docteur will catch you?" said Hugh, coming in and shutting the door behind him.

"No, it will be ten days yet before he can return—Céléstine did say so. But where is your pictures? I have ever so much wished to see them."

"Over there," said Hugh, with a jerk of his head towards Regis. "I'll bring them next time"—he paused—"some day," he added abruptly.

"Will you not rest a little while?" she said timidly, when they had reached the summer-house, and he sat down in the place where he had sat before, knowing well enough that duty lay on the other side of the wall, and that it was better to depart as a fool, than remain as a knave—to Dosia.

"Thank you," he said, and remained, watching her at her work.

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It was a change from the noise, the racket, the salt freshness that seemed always to blow through the Red House—and a sense of peace and rest came to him then that he had not known for days.

Did not the suave, gracious personality of the young girl count for something, soothing the irritated man like a healing balsam on a rasped hurt?

He did not know it, but her voice, her ways, the very look of her soft, winning eyes, rested him, and without analysing her charm he knew that she was adorable—and probably only a man is aware of the full significance of that term when applied to a woman—and that she was as unconscious of her power as a child, and not even *tant soit peu* coquette.

Who was she, this dainty little workwoman, stitching away for dear life, far from her beloved Paris, and alone in this remote Devonshire eyrie? He longed to know, yet as he slowly drank the cider she brought him,

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and they talked together, she let fall no word that could give him so much as a hint about herself.

He set down a good deal of her reserve to the training of a young French girl, but he also soon came to the conclusion that Felida had a secret that she would guard very tenaciously, as a woman *will* keep one that it is to her interest not to divulge.

Whoever she was, she was *simpatica*, which is beyond being beautiful, or clever, or good, and is as a magic wand to the creature who possesses it, and with which she touches all hearts, touches, alas! too often but to break them.

What did these young people talk about on that superb July morning?

There was no scandal, no discussion of the daily papers, none of the paltry society talk, into which even Dosia's tongue slipped too readily, and Hugh could hardly have told afterwards what had been the subjects of conversation between them.

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But he appreciated the quick comprehension, the swift response of look and word, the intuitive good taste that avoided anything that could jar upon him, and the sweetness of a voice and temper that, for the time at least, breathed the very peace of Eden into his soul.

But it was not long before he rose, drawing his limbs together with a certain resolution as he saw how the colour faded out of her olive cheeks—satin-smooth as such skins sometimes are—while the soft darkness of her eyes was suddenly dimmed, as if with pain.

"Do you go away—so soon?" she said wistfully.

"Yes."

He had meant to say:

"Good-bye, Felida, I shall not see you again," but with the blundering tenderness of a man who shrinks from inflicting a small hurt in the present that will save a woman from a much worse one in the future, he did

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not say it, only held out his hand in silence.

"And you will come again—with the pictures?" she said, in a voice coaxing as a child who begs for sweetmeats.

He hesitated, looking down at the *mignonne* face, then glanced at the lonely garden, thought of her forlornness, and was conquered.

"I will come back—with the pictures," he said, and went swiftly away, and for a long while the girl stood at the door, watching the ascending and descending and gradually diminishing figure in the distance.

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CHAPTER V.

"The Gordian knot,
Which true lovers knit,
Undo it you cannot,
Nor yet break it."

"DOSIA!" said her mother.

"Yes, dear."

"Mr. Valentine comes here very often."

"Yes, mother."

"Papa will be asking about it, you know, when he comes."

Dosia was playing with the youngest child, and did not seem to hear.

"Is there—is there anything between you?"

Dosia set the baby on his legs, then moved to the big window and stood looking out on the pleasant garden at the back of the house, and the grove of trees on the hill beyond.

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"Mother," she said at last, "when you and—father—were—making—up your minds—about each other—you didn't want to be—hurried—did you?"

Mother considered, smiled a little, and said, "No."

"And I don't want to be hurried either, dear. Not for ever so long—perhaps not at all," Dosia added, a little wildly, with a strange note in her voice that made Mrs. Treherne look at her anxiously, rousing the fierce mother-instinct in her at once, to shield her child from pain.

For Mrs. Treherne was one of those women who are mothers first, and everything else after, whose very opinions are moulded by their children; who live in them, and die for them, if necessary, but have no existence worth mentioning apart from them.

"Mr. Valentine has not called since Saturday, and to-day is Wednesday," said Mrs. Treherne, sitting erect, and with a sharp

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flurry in her voice that made one think of an indignant hen about to revenge some injury to her chicks.

"Yes," said Dosia, turning round, "and it won't break my heart if it is Saturday again before he appears."

"I believe he is an impertinent young man," said Mrs. Treherne, with an air of having all her soft feathers ruffled. "However, papa will be here to-morrow, and——"

"Mother," said Dosia, standing up very tall and straight before her, "if you say one word to father about *him*, I'll never forgive you. It will be time enough to worry father when ——, and that will be *never*," she added to herself, as she turned away.

"Mr. Valentine's here!" said Onny, bursting into the room as if shot from a catapult. "Look here, Dosy, do you want me to play gooseberry this afternoon?" This last in a stage whisper.

"Of course! Where's my hat? O! I've got it on! Mother, I'll take your gloves."

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And she kissed Mrs. Treherne, and ran out of the room.

"How do you do?" her mother heard the girl say. "I was just going out. Will you come too? And Onny, as I want him to bring something home for me. *You* can carry it! O, no, thanks! Is that my sunshade?"

The mother went to the front of the house and looked out of the window to watch the handsome young pair down the street. They walked a little apart, and the man's back had a distinct air of offence, but whether this was due to Onny's persistently holding his hand in his own dirty one, and listening open-eared to every word he said, Mrs. Treherne was not able to determine.

"Did you ever see such fuchsias and myrtles?" said Dosia, as they went along the picturesque street that straggled down to the sea. "Do you know that they grow here in the open air all the year round?"

Hugh stiffly expressed himself as previously unaware of that fact in botany, and conver-

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sation languished until the Boss came pelting after them, and by his gambols detached Onny temporarily from his post of observation.

What a day to be happy in, and to love in! What youth and health was theirs to be merry with, yet they walked glum as mutes, with half a yard of dusty road between them!

They came out in front of the sea, from which blew continually the strong brisk wind that smacked of fish, and was declared to be the healthiest along all the coast, looked at the bodies that strewed the shingle, and at the bathers in the middle distance, glanced at the gingerbread castle that crowned the hill on the right, then turned and went along the gravelled walk that bordered the beach, and ended in the shallow, sluggish river, beyond which was a cliff surmounted by a flagstaff.

Onny accompanied them closely, riding on Hugh's stick, and doing his best to break it.

"Only think," she said, "I climbed right up to the top yesterday, and it is so pretty there. I had more than half a mind to walk to Regis."

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How he hated that pleasant formal tone without a note of human nature—of Dosia's nature—in it, so he answered her in the same cold way, and hoped that her exertions had done her no harm.

Dosia laughed.

"I can walk ten miles at a stretch easily," she said, "and even got to the top of Golden Cap Hill once. And it is six hundred feet high."

"Take me there some day," he said, "and I will see if I can climb it too."

"It is ever so far from here," she said, shaking her head; "do you know your Regis well?" she added quickly. "I was hearing such a droll tale about it the other day, that I never heard before."

"Tell it me," he said absently, for he was listening for the snap of his stick.

"Oh! it is nothing much—only an assertion of women's rights, as long ago as 1651."

"They began with Eve," said Hugh smiling.

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"Well, this is how it happened," said Dosia, trying not to smile too. "Charles II., during the Civil War, was to make an attempt to leave this country for France, and a particular part of Charmouth Beach was selected as the place of embarkation, and a vessel belonging to a trustworthy Lyme man, named Stephen Limbey, was engaged for the purpose. The king in disguise, with Mrs. Juliana Conningsbury, a member of the Wyndham family, seated behind him on a pillion to disarm suspicion, arrived in due course at the inn, where a room had been engaged, and soon after, Limbey appeared and reported his arrangements all complete and that he should be ready with his vessel at the time and place appointed. He then went back to Lyme to take leave of his wife, whom he had previously made acquainted of his engagement."

"Very foolish of him," said Hugh.

"And pray, sir," said Dosia, facing round and showing an indignant face beneath her

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smart straw hat, "do you suppose a woman can *never* hold her tongue if she pleases?"

"O! yes, she can," said Hugh with great bitterness. "She can sometimes refuse to say either yes or no, and keep a man shilly-shallying while she hesitates which monosyllable to use."

"Well," continued Dosia, in a considerably raised voice, "he must have been very fond of his wife."

"And very trustful," said Hugh sardonically.

"And evidently she was very fond of *him*, for what does she do but beguile him into a room and proceed to lock him up! The proclamation for apprehending the king was out. She had no mind to let her husband be involved in so dangerous an enterprise, and hard as he begged and prayed to be released, telling her that at midnight the king and all his party would be awaiting him on Charmouth shore, she wouldn't budge an inch."

"Probably played the piano to drive him mad," said Hugh unkindly.

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"So after the poor king had waited for hours with his attendants——"

"Which the conversation must have been decidedly sulphurous," cut in Hugh.

"It was decided to return to Trent without delay, which they did early next morning," concluded Dosia, with a sudden burst of glee.

That bright laugh, the natural voice and manner into which she had gradually slipped, acted like magic on Hugh, and when, as they came to the ferry, with its tub of a boat and its sleepy Charon, he looked quickly round, Onny and the Boss were rolling over each other in transports on the sand, the broken pieces of stick not far off. For the moment, at least, Dosia was unchaperoned.

"Jump in," he said smartly to Dosia, and half lifting her to the boat as he spoke.

Taken by surprise, she made no resistance, and in a moment the shore, with Onny racing to fulfil his neglected duties, was receding rapidly from them, and turning simul-

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taneously the eyes of Hugh and Dosia met in a swift, sudden look, that changed in a breath to passion in his, and in hers to one of those old half-shy, wholly-sweet regards that had once made a summer warmth about his heart, and told him how inexpressibly dear she was to him.

He clasped her hand, and so without a word they drifted across the sluggish stream, and when they had reached the other side, kept silently on till they reached the little gate at the foot of the path all overarched with trees that led up the hill to the cliffs.

Love surely could wish no fairer path to climb than this, and as Hugh closed the gate, Dosia thought that God indeed had been very good to her, and rewarded instead of punishing her for her wayward spirit.

"Dosia!" cried the young man, holding out eager arms to her, "come to me, love!"

She had retreated as he advanced, but now

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as he stopped she stole back, and not raising her eyes to his face, lifted both hands to lay them on his breast, when she saw, right across the white flannel, a single black, fine, silken woman's hair.

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CHAPTER VI.

"O Lorde, what is this world's blisse
That changeth as the mone,
My somer's day in lusty May
Is darked before the none."

EXPLANATIONS are odious, and Hugh Valentine would not explain, would not even suggest any possible means by which the flagitious testimony could have drifted on to his innocent breast, and having made that first and gigantic mistake, stuck to it like grim death, with all the perversity of a truly honest and thorough man.

Her anger, her entreaties even, could not move him from his position that he loved her, but how that hair came to repose above the region of his heart he couldn't and

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wouldn't explain. The glorious green arch of the trees looked down on the jangle, and perchance pitied the fretting ephemeral creatures below, but to Dosia this loveliness that was to have given an added beauty to love, lent her an additional pang, and the most horrible hour of her life was ever afterwards associated in her mind with a steep woodland path.

Then at last all patience deserted her, she told him how she scorned such love as his, that was one woman's yesterday and might be another's to-morrow; how she had no mind to assist at a marriage service in which the word "one woman" should be omitted, and that of "every woman" put in its place.

"Yes," she said, undaunted by the horror in Hugh's face, horror and stern condemnation, too, "it is brutal, it is unwomanly to speak so—I know it—but I must speak out now, once and for all. I could not live the life that most women live—my husband must be mine, *mine* absolutely, or I will not

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have him at all. They say life is made up of compromises, but mine, in matters of love, never could be, and never shall."

And she had opened the gate, before he knew of her intention, and sped quickly away.

Hugh made no attempt to follow her, but sat down under a tree to do half an hour of bitter reckoning with himself. He had been angry with Dosia, chilled by her coldness, disgusted by her capriciousness, irritated to the point of resolving to leave her without waiting for that promised answer to his question, yet, lo! the first sign of naturalness in her, a single sweet look from her eyes had brought him to her feet, and in that brief passage across the ferry he had realized that her mutability, her caprice, had lain but as froth above the steadfastness of a character and a love upon which a man might most surely and safely rely.

And because he had been angry with Dosia, because he had not been able to bear his pain

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without soothing, he had gone to a gentle little soul who gave him kindest welcome, and who had made an oasis in the wilderness of his unprofitable thoughts and desires, without his considering in the least what sort of good he might be doing *her*.

His visits to the girl had been a disloyalty to Dosia, he had felt that from the beginning, yet he had persisted in them, and now, as if to illustrate the eternal truth that one's sin is sure to find one out, he had been found out, and ignominiously found out, by the woman he most devotedly loved.

How came that fatal token of Felida across his breast? She had been looking over his shoulder while he sketched, or the breeze had blown it towards him as they sat side by side, she with her needle-work, and he with his pipe and work, happy and rejoicing in their happiness like the two truants that they were in thought and deed.

It had been the doctor whom they had feared as the avenging schoolmaster, but dis-

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covery had come from a different quarter, and in a totally unexpected manner.

And he had been a coward on first intention, and deliberately afterwards, when he might have saved himself and said what was really the truth, that the little brown French girl and he were comrades, and comrades only, who had together enjoyed "a good time" as the children say.

They had been distant and they had been friendly. She had fed him out of her daily portion, and he her out of his occasional wallet; they had talked together, laughed together, even frolicked together after a fashion; and if they had sometimes squabbled together, had managed to become friends again without any of that dangerous kissing again with tears of which we have all heard. He had found her *bon camarade* in the truest sense of the word, and an uncommonly smart critic, too, of his sketches, for Felida was one of those born judges who know what is good, though not in the least why. So her criti-

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cisms, if impertinent, were always just, and he actually found himself improving beneath her merciless but kindly eye. And while he painted, she worked, and they talked continually. He found her a delightful companion, one who banished time, and who was never dull, or long enough in any one mood to weary him; she had, too, that capacity for extracting pleasure out of the merest trifles that makes the possessor a ray of sunshine to all whom she may chance to meet, and in this particular greatly resembled Dosia in her natural self.

And yet it had often struck him as curious how entirely she lived and revelled in the present. Candid as she appeared, quick and transparent as were her thoughts, she never alluded to the past, or gave the slightest clue to what that past might be.

Once, indeed, she had called him "Felix," and blushed guiltily at a slip which he had affected not to observe, but it had set him thinking, and often he longed to question her, but forbore.

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He did not even know her surname. She was Felida, that was all, but he had quick eyes; and if her French air, her pretty accent, made all that she did seem graceful, he noted that her forefinger showed signs of work, and she loved work, and was quicker at it than a lady would be who has others to sew for her, so that long ago he had come to the conclusion that Felida had been bred a *couturiere*, and that even now, when she might be idle, she loved to follow her trade still.

Out of his life, out of his set, why then had he felt a curious shrinking and trembling of the heart as the moment drew near to say farewell, as if she had crept into some corner of it, and he could not bear to thrust her out of it? To be sure she had shown no signs of inconvenient fondness for him, or more pleasure in his company than that of good comradeship, and he had been inwardly thankful for this, though, man-like, he wished her to be sorry, very sorry, when he went away.

She should never know how much she had

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cost him; he owed her at least as much as that, this gentle young person who had made him contented when he was so miserable, and who had separated him from the proudest, purest, most worshipful woman he had ever known.

Well, he would go away, but first he would bid Felida good-bye, and when Dosia could bring herself to call him back first, and hear his explanation afterwards—then he would come back, indeed, on the wings of the wind.

And then, as the afternoon shadows grew longer, all the peace and loveliness of his surroundings smote painfully on his heart, as awhile ago they had done on Dosia's, and he struck his foot in anger against the ground, thinking of the golden hours that had been theirs to squander, and which they had put to such lamentable use.

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CHAPTER VII.

"It standeth so; a deed is do
Whereof moche harm shall grow."

DOSIA had rushed away, not knowing how she was going to get back across the river, only over the ferry she would not go just yet, and she wanted some place in which to hide, to hide from herself as much as Hugh, then with all a woman's inconsistency blamed him for not following, even while she dreaded pursuit.

So it was true, she said to herself, walking on and on, forgetting even to put up her white umbrella between herself and the sun. She had felt all along that something more than her own waywardness had come between them, and now she *knew*.

Since when had she been so sensitive to him

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that the mere shadow of another woman thrown upon his heart had become instantly apparent to her, and so revolted her fastidious taste as to make her shy away from him?

All through that long day in which he had tarried on his way to her—and in what haste had he been to hurry to her from Town!—she had instinctively foreboded evil, and his explanations, when he did arrive, were so lame and unsatisfactory as to bring her pride up in arms—where it had remained more or less ever since. And she had let herself be stripped of it at a word, a look, from the man who found it child's play to deceive her, and, like the mantle brought into King Arthur's court it had shrivelled around her, and left her bare to her own and his contempt.

"I was over ready," she said, as she followed the bank, below which in the low mud were lying the skeleton cuttle-fish in which her young brothers' souls delighted. "I doubted him, yet I was ready to fall into his arms—and should be there now but for that—black—hair.

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Black! He always admired dark women, just as I admired dark men. What folly to think one's *heart* will override constitutional taste! It will be a wrench—but I'll get over it. O! I'll get over it! Can it be one of those girls staying with his uncle? No—they are both fair—he told me so. Let me think. He has been sketching a great deal lately—he has brought his tools and sketches over several times, and they are all—yes, now I have it—they are *all* bits and views of the Landslip. If she were a Regis girl, he would be spending his time with her in the town, and he couldn't combine his family life in the Bellew House, his sketches, his visits to me" (her short, rosy lip curled) " and the fashionable Regis girl too. It is some one who accompanies him when he goes sketching."

Dosia sat down on the bank to think, and now recovered sufficiently to put up her umbrella.

" I noticed one day, in a corner of one of his sketches, an etching of a girl's head—

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pure black and white—evidently the natural colours of the head sketched."

She paused to stretch out a dainty bare hand, pink-palmed, with delicate wrist veined in blue, and scowled at it, as if its apple-blossom tints were nauseating.

"How can you blame him?" she said. "And that hair was as silky and fine as mine is wavy and rough——"

She drew a deep breath.

"I'll find out," she said aloud, "by hook or by crook I'll find out. Where he meets her. What she is like. If he is fooling *her* as he has fooled me. If she is as unwomanly and uses as disgraceful language as I do—but I don't think *that's* possible. I wonder where he has gone? But he won't dare to come near me again. To pretend to love me, and philander with another woman! That's a man all over—but I thought he was different. I'll die single. Who is that little fat man waving to me on the opposite bank? Good heavens—it's *father!*"

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CHAPTER VIII.

"Whatsoe'er befalle, I never shal
Of this thing you upbraid:
But yf ye go, and leve me so,
Then have ye me betraied."

COLONEL TREHERNE sitting at breakfast in the bosom of his family that glorious August morning, was, and looked, as happy a man as a father can possibly be.

Those bright-faced, curly-headed boys and girls, with which the table seemed literally to brim over, all looking eagerly and affectionately towards him, made a noble reward for the many sacrifices he went through on their account, but in the midst of all the cheerful bustle and laughter, one little pang made itself felt in his breast, and that was when he looked at his eldest and best beloved child, Dosia.

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He had already heard a little, and Dosia's face, pale for all its smiles (and if one wished to know how sweet and truly lovable Dosia could be, one must see her in the post of elder sister to these unruly young people, who at once tyrannised over and adored her), told him much.

Could any father see his child drift away from the haven of home into a strange port without a contraction of the heart and a certain fear?

But meanwhile the sun was shining, the salt smell of the sea (though out of sight) came invigoratingly through the windows, and breakfast—the best meal of the day to a really healthy human animal—was there to discuss, so Colonel Treherne gave himself up to enjoyment in the midst of a babel of tongues that a stranger would have found simply deafening.

These were the holidays, and the governess had no more onerous duties than to prevent her charges drowning themselves or damaging each other with spade and bucket, for rows

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between these sturdy youngsters were of wholesome and frequent occurrence, alarmed nobody and did no harm.

Mrs. Treherne, who at forty years of age wore a bit of lace on her head, matronly gowns, and walked abroad in a bonnet instead of a hat, was a lovely woman still, and probably a good deal happier than she had been at Dosia's age, as indeed she was just then thinking as she poured out the tea.

She knew instinctively that things had gone "aglee" with the girl, who had indeed said nothing to her, only walked about her room all night.

But it takes more than a night or two of pain to dim the freshness of eighteen years, and even Onny's sharp eyes did not detect anything amiss.

Nevertheless he bore her a grudge for giving him the slip the day before, giving her some knowing nods and winks from time to time that she could not openly resent, and so pretended not to see.

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She was racking her brains to think of how she could get away from the house for three or four clear hours—perhaps longer—and at the very time in the day, too, when she would be most missed, and her absence remarked upon.

For by strenuous thought, and following one clue and another, she had arrived at a conclusion as to about the hour when Hugh was likely to be in the company of his black-haired friend. And that hour, midway between his leaving Regis after breakfast, and arriving at Seamouth in the early afternoon, would be somewhere about noon.

But go she must and would, even if she had afterwards to confess to her unmaidenly quest. She was not a woman to spy upon a man, but she felt she must get to the bottom of this, and it was a matter of life and death to her, and she would know what there was to know, and be done with it. She knew herself, and that the man who put her wrong in love would put her wrong for life, if she

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did not bring her whole strength to grapple with the difficulty, and settle it one way or the other forever.

But even while she was thinking how she could escape, before being bidden by her father to her usual walk with him, he said to his wife:

"We will start for Exeter by the 11.15, Charlotte, then we shall arrive in comfortable time for lunch."

"What are you going to do in Exeter, father?" said Dosia, trying to keep the rush of relief out of her voice, while Onny looked at her triumphantly, with anticipations of a long day in which he would play detective.

Colonel Treherne laughed, but did not explain, not even when Dosia came behind him, and coaxed her cheek to his.

"It's too bad, my first day at home," he said, "but no more dissipations after this—when I am at home, I like to stay there."

The younger children had already tumbled over each other out of the room, and the next

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moment, with pinafores torn off, and hats and sun-bonnets flung on askew, were seen in the road, rushing pell-mell to the sea.

Only Onny remained, with an expression in his blue eye that made Dosia tremble. And, indeed, when Colonel and Mrs. Treherne had departed, and the coast was perfectly clear, Onny, who had never let her out of his sight since breakfast, stuck to her with a tenacity and determination that she tried to combat in vain, for now his parents were gone, he evidently felt his responsibility doubly great.

On messages to tradespeople he would not go; to even a visit to the confectioner's, with cash in his pocket, he hardened his heart, and was proof against the offer of a long ride inland on a donkey, for dearer than all these things to Onny was the gratification of that detective instinct which was located so oddly in his otherwise childish mind.

The simplest way would have been to take her small tormentor with her, but this would

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have entailed the risk of discovery by Hugh, as his shrill little voice carried far, and might give warning of their approach.

So, when time was slipping away, and still Onny, having accompanied her to the ferry, gripped her hand with his small dirty one, she resolved to make an appeal to his young six-year-old honour, and stooping down to look very earnestly in his eyes, she said:

"Onny, I'm going to tell you a secret. Will you promise me to keep it—just like a man?"

"What is it?" said Onny cautiously, but much flattered nevertheless.

"I am going across the ferry—over there—to meet—to meet Mr. Valentine."

An absurd little gleam of propriety flashed suddenly into Onny's blue eyes, and he said:

"I *think* I'd better come too."

"No, not to-day. And it's a secret, Onny, quite a secret—you understand?"

"Y—e—s," said Onny, "but I didn't *promise*, Dosy, you know."

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"No, but it's all the same," said Dosia, as Charon saluted her. "Here is half-a-crown for you; don't spend it all at once," and Dosia got quickly into the boat before the boy had recovered from his amazement at possessing so much money.

But his mind was troubled, and he called out:

"I shall come to fetch you, Dosy, if you're *very* long!"

To which Dosia replied, with much energy and raised voice:

"And if you do, Onny, you'll be a *sneak*, and not a *man* at all."

Whereupon Onny curled himself up on the bank, and after meditating until he had seen her walk along the opposite side, uplifting a warning finger to him before she vanished, he finally decided, though much against the grain, to be a "man," and departed for consolation to the toffee-shop. Dosia stopped abruptly inside the gate, just where she and Hugh had stood together, and she turned

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sick, and covered her eyes with her hand, thinking, that miserable as she was, she would perhaps be more miserable yet when she should again, in a few hours' time, be standing on this spot.

The way was steep, and she did not linger, for this was not the enchanted way, all over-arched with green and gold, that love, with love for company, had once been promised to her, and soon she was on the high undulating ground at the summit of the cliff, with the fresh wind blowing about her, and the sun, as he rode high in the heavens, smiting her hard.

But she was in capital condition, and, like all good walkers, loved the exercise, and looked her best while practising it. The goddess of health herself never wore brighter, more beautiful mien than did Dosia in her white gown and hat, going over rough and even alike at a pace that many a man would have found it hard to follow.

"It will be somewhere about mid-way be-

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tween Regis and Seamouth," she had said to herself, and she was right.

She was not at all tired, and had only an additional tint of rose in her cheeks, when she spied in the distance the chimney of a little house (and there was more than one humble dwelling on the Landslip) surrounded by a perfectly new wall—a wall that had not been there the year before, when she had come this way with her father.

The house lay in a partial hollow, and she was herself at that moment on higher ground, but as she approached nearer, keeping as close as possible to the back of the cliff, she half uttered an exclamation, for a good way below, with their backs to the open door in the wall, sat a young pair in the sun ; the man sketching, the girl working, and to all appearance perfectly happy in each other's company.

Dosia drew in her breath sharply, and clenched both hands above her furiously-beating heart, as if it must break in pieces

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did she not hold it so, while she gazed at the little smooth, dark head that leaned so confidingly towards Hugh's fair curly one.

The white folded kerchief showed a bit of soft olive skin, and the graceful shape of the girl's neck; the little figure, too, was very slight, and the clothes on it so *bien mise* as to announce her at once as a Frenchwoman.

"A little soft, brown mouse," thought Dosia, jealously, "with pretty, winning ways —as every gesture tells—not much spirit, but then no counter-balancing temper—suave, gracious, will let him talk about himself, and exact next to nothing—the sort of woman who creeps into a man's heart—and stays there. Some men will have it so—they are to give, the woman is to receive—it flatters their self-love, and they are kindly savages though they often develop into unkindly ones under their wives' ruinous indulgence."

She paused to stamp her foot on the soft turf in a paroxysm of fury and wounded pride.

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"How dare he—how *dare* he!" she said breathlessly, nearly swept out of herself into stepping down to them there and then; but the thought of the vulgarity of the inevitable scene sharply pulled her back and stayed her, and luck favoured her inasmuch that neither he nor she turned and saw her.

A person in the foreground, looking at the pair in the middle distance, and at the girl beyond, must at once have hit the difference there was between the two women.

The one, however charming and graceful she might be, was a *couturiere* born and bred; the girl in her simple white gown, a gentlewoman to her finger tips, and of the same order of society as that to which the man, sketching so contentedly, unmistakably belonged. And sweet looked Dosia, for all her wildness, and the dumb, helpless agony of jealousy and pain that only her will kept at bay, but which would overwhelm her in fullest flood by and bye . . .

Well, she had stooped her pride to come

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here to find out the truth, and she had found it, and how much the better was she for knowing it now? Presently she would go home, to digest her knowledge at leisure. . . .

She could hear the murmur of their voices, but was too far off to distinguish what they said. How blessedly happy and contented looked their backs, and very thorough, evidently, was the cordial understanding between them! He talked while she listened, and both were satisfied, and, indeed, made a delightful contrast as they sat together.

Dosia turned, and had scarcely gone many yards, being, in fact, behind one of those clumps of trees or thickets with which the Slip abounded, when the sound of Hugh's voice coming towards her told that they had risen. Drawing herself still further into the shade, she soon heard them laughing as they climbed the ascent, and even caught a glimpse of Felida as she went quickly through the door in the wall, turning her head as she went.

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Hugh followed more slowly, carrying his belongings, and his step was lagging, and his face downcast, Dosia thought.

He left the door half open, and Dosia stood still, longing, with all the strength of her body and soul, to look inside it . . . but they would see her to a certainty—and to be a spy is one thing, and to be caught, another.

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CHAPTER IX.

"But fare ye weel, my ae fause love,
That I have loved sae lang;
It sets ye choose another love,
And let young Benjie gang."

"I HAVE come to wish you good-bye, Felida." That is what Hugh Valentine had come to say two hours ago, and he had not said it yet.

It had been a happy little time, and one for which the piper had to be paid heavily, thought Hugh Valentine, as he looked at her sitting on the other side of the little table, all her tools for work laid out before her, and, for a wonder, silent, a little pout on her lips, as if she were deep in thought.

"What were you thinking about, Felida?" he said at last, the words he had really intended to say failing him.

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"I did think," she said rather sadly, "how joyous were the hours I have spent with you outside that wicked wall."

"But I made a little thief of you," said Hugh; "and who shall say where your thieving will end?"

"But I did only change one key for another," said Felida, looking at him earnestly, "and as she never does use it, where is the harm? M. le Docteur did store the place well before he did go away. And it was sweet to look at the sea," she went on, her wistful eyes seeming to pierce the envious wall.

"But if you do not like it, why do you stay here?" he said.

But she only blushed, putting the question by as she did all others that ever so faintly savoured of curiosity, and the reason of her presence here.

There fell a little silence between them, in which a light breeze sprang up, for it was verging towards evening. He knew that it

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would be as hard or harder to speak in an hour's time as it was then.

"Felida," he said, valiantly, at last, and something in his voice made her put her work down, while her colour faded, "we have had a jolly little time together here, have we not?"

"Yes, Mr. Hugh," she said, with a catch in her breath; "it has been one long summer day since you did put your thiefy hand over the wall to steal the rose."

Her dark eyes rested on the fair head, just then bent, as if she loved its sunshine too; but Hugh, looking up, felt her eyes hurt him, and he spoke quickly to get the pain over.

"Felida," he said, "I am going away to-day. I have come to say good-bye."

She was threading her needle as he spoke, but the eye jumped from the cotton, and she started up as if to seek the brighter light outside. But he caught her hand as she passed him in the narrow space and looked up in her face.

Felida's expression was one of bewildered

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distress and pain, then her chin dropped heavily on her breast, her eyes closed, and she seemed on the point of falling, when Hugh put out his arm to save her, and with bowed head she sank gently into his arms.

So absolutely still she rested that he thought her in a dead faint; but no, her colour remained, her breath came gently and evenly, she was only profoundly asleep. The slight, pliant figure rested confidently in the shelter of his arm as a child, the pretty head, overweighted with slumber, nestled softly into his sunburned neck, and no more perfect picture of domestic peace and security could well be presented than this young pair to the eyes of Dosia, whose blonde head stole round the doorway, remaining long enough for detectation had Hugh's eyes been turned that way. Was that a sob or sigh he heard, as of some sorely-wounded fleeing thing?

So swiftly indeed fled Dosia that she did not even see advancing from the Regis side a young man who wore the dress of a French

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sea-captain, and who was hastening towards the very place from which she was running headlong away.

Hurrying joy ran riot in his face and bearing as he pushed wider the partly open postern door, such joy as fills a man who finds himself at his journey's end, and within measurable distance of his heart's desire, and he had advanced several steps before he caught sight of the two beautiful young figures in their attitude of rest, the blonde and the brown head leaning together as in perfect trustfulness and love.

Seeing them, the man stood still, a human, passionate being struck to stone, every faculty arrested in him save sight; but this could not last, and his senses returned to him with a violence that threatened madness. Mad, indeed, for the time he was, and quite irresponsible as he dashed forward, and with the speed of lightning, and almost before Hugh had realised the intrusion, tore the sleeping girl from Hugh's knee, then held her at arm's length, with that in his face which might

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have killed a timid woman outright with fear.

Heavy with sleep her eyes opened upon him, but without fear. Neither recognition, nor anything but a perfectly natural astonishment appeared in their awakening; then she frowned, trying to free herself from the man's rude grasp, looking involuntarily to Hugh for assistance.

"Sir," she said, in French, speaking as though to a stranger, and with the distant, courteous look in her eyes one gives to strangers, "this man is hurting me. Will you not beg of him that he will release me?"

The man let her go as suddenly as if she had broken the arms that held her.

"Oh, my God," he cried in French, "you call me 'this man.' Am I not your husband, Felida?"

"My husband!" She looked at him with wide, incredulous eyes, innocent as heaven. "I have no husband. I did not ever see you before in my life—*never!*"

The man gave one great deep gasp, eyes

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and lips parted in a stupid stare. He seemed incapable of speech, incapable of movement, and at that moment a great dog came bounding up the path, and seeing Felida made straight for her, covering her with caresses.

She thrust him from her with a look of disgust.

"Oh, sir! take him away," she cried to Hugh. "I do hate strange dogs, and he will bite me."

"What!" cried the stranger, "you don't even remember the poor dog whom you fondled and fed? Good God! you must be mad —or am I?"

He dashed his hand across his brow, looked suspiciously around him, as if doubting what he saw to be real, or only figments of the brain, then cried in a heartbroken voice:

"I'm not mad, nor you either. I'm only betrayed. I left you at home, safe, as I thought; I returned to find you gone—spirited away by some French doctor, and I find you after long search clasped in the arms of an-

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other man! Shame on you!" he cried in a terrible voice of condemnation, more convincing than any wrath, "shame on you, I say, woman, and less than woman!"

Tears rose to Felida's eyes—if indeed she were less than woman she could not but be moved by this man's despair, and she made a gesture of sorrow, of pity, as she said gently:

"My friend, you are mistaken by some fancied resemblance, for indeed I am not your wife. As I said before, I have never seen you until to-day."

He uttered a wild, fierce ejaculation and strode to her, snatching her pretty hand roughly, and holding it out, palm uppermost.

"See here," he cried, with forced calmness, "here is the mark of the wedding-ring that I, Felix Le Feuvre, placed on your finger two months ago in the parish church of Auvergne, before all the members of your family and of mine. But the ring is gone; perhaps"

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(and he turned on Hugh with the ferocity of a tiger) "monsieur is taking charge of it for you?"

He paused, faltered, the mere touch of her hand acting on him like a charm. His face softened, then lit up as at a happy thought.

"Can it be that you are ill, Felida?" he said, entreatingly. "They told me that you were delicate, 'strange, sometimes,' they said—but if you are mad, Felida, and have forgotten, I will nurse and bring you back to health. Indeed, indeed, you must be mad, Felida, to be so wicked."

Felida's mood had changed. She snatched her hand away angrily.

"I never did wear a wedding-ring," she said petulantly. "Why do you come here to disturb me when I am so happy?" and she turned from him to Hugh as to her natural protector and laughed, whether from pure nervousness, or prompted by the devil, who shall say?

The laugh jarred on Hugh. She was

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in the midst of a tragedy, and she did not know it. Tearless, white, convulsed with something just born in his eyes growing swiftly to a giant's strength, the man she had denied looked at the laughing, unthinking girl, till with a spring, like a tiger on his prey, he leaped upon her, trying to strangle the life out of her throat before she could even utter a cry, or Hugh put out a hand to save her.

It was a brief struggle—brief and horrible, for the dog joined in the fray, so that it seemed as if three wild beasts were struggling for possession of some white wounded thing, whose breath was being torn out of it, alike by those who sought to save as those who sought to slay it.

The hissing of oaths, the subdued growls of the brute who mauled and tore at his master's enemy, made an audible accompaniment to the deadly struggle in which the two men were engaged, and which resulted at last in Hugh's victory, as he wrenched the murderer's

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hands from the girl's throat, and flung him violently to a distance.

The man lay stunned and silent; he had struck his head against a stone in falling, but Hugh recked little of that as he flung himself down by the corpse-like figure that had been so bright and full of happiness but half-an-hour ago.

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CHAPTER X.

"O, thank ye na my heart was sair
When my love dropt down and spake na mair?"

"FELIDA!" he cried, and could have wept at the sound of his own voice, to which no answer came, but only something strange and new upon the pale face, as if Death spoke for, and triumphantly claimed her as his own.

Then he took the light shape in his arms, without one backward look at the prone figure with the dog beside it, and carried it swiftly to the house.

Blood was pouring from the wounds made by the dog's teeth, his clothes were torn, and he looked dishevelled enough to frighten a stronger-minded person than the old Normandy peasant who sat by the hearth peeling potatoes.

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"*La La!*" she cried, as he came in and deposited his burden on the kitchen table, "what do you here, and what have you done to *la petite?*" she added sharply, as she hobbled to the table.

She spoke in French, and he answered her in the same tongue.

"I think she is dead," he said; "come and see."

A woman must talk, even if she be dying, or there are only dying ears to hear her; so while Célestine searched for signs of life, she lavished question after question upon Hugh. He answered her briefly enough, his heart aching at the thought of what his week of dallying had cost this poor, silent girl; and presently noticing that her little fist was firmly closed, he opened it with some difficulty, finding the threaded needle that she had held fast through the swiftness of the succeeding catastrophe. He took it away, together with her silver thimble. A sob rose in his throat as he set them down. The old woman shook

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her head. She could find no throb of the heart, no beat of the pulse, and groaning, she wished that M. le Docteur were here, or rather that he had never gone away at all.

"He forbade me to lose sight of her, or to let any one in, and the key of the door is in my pocket," she said, turning the wrinkled pallor of her face on Hugh; "and *voilà!* here are you, though how you got here I do not know. Did *you* kill *la petite!*" she added sharply.

"No," said Hugh. "And now watch by her; I am going to find a doctor."

With a last look at the pale girl, under whose head he placed a cushion, he turned to go, but the lonely house on the cliff was to be that day one of surprises, for on the threshold he met a stranger, a Frenchman.

"Confound you, sir!" cried that gentleman, warmly and in excellent English; "what the devil are you doing here?"

It is always agreeable to be addressed in

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one's own vernacular, and Hugh felt a distinct sense of relief as he said:

"You are M. le Docteur?"

"At your service." But the stout, fresh keen-faced Frenchman looked quite the reverse of his words.

"There is work for you here," said Hugh, turning on his heel in the narrow passage. "Felida is——"

"Pray what is Felida to *you*, sir?" flashed out the doctor.

But Hugh had opened the kitchen door, and for all answer pointed to the table.

The doctor flew to her, his expression less that of sorrow than of anger at the destruction of something valuable, and a passionate exclamation escaped him, as he leaned over her.

"Whose work is this?" he cried savagely.

"The work of a madman who called himself her husband," said Hugh. "Is she dead?" he added swiftly.

For awhile the doctor made no reply, but

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pursued a close examination; then he jerked out:

"Insensible, and three parts strangled, but she will probably recover. Go now, and return later, when you too will require my attendance. A fight?" he added, with something strange and cynical in the glance he turned on Hugh's ragged trousers.

"No, a dog," said Hugh, full of joy. "Didn't you see one in the garden," he cried quickly, "beside the man who lay stunned?"

"I saw nothing and nobody," said the doctor, drily; "but finding my postern door open—to which there are two keys, one in my possession, and one, as I supposed, in Cé'éstine's—I took the liberty of walking through my own garden to my own house."

"Where can he be?" said Hugh. "He must have picked himself up pretty quickly after I brought Felida away."

"*Felida?*" said the doctor, significantly.

Hugh blushed, and passed out.

No, the man was not in the garden, though

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the ground showed evidence of the struggle that had gone forward, and the postern door was locked, both keys presumably being in the doctor's pocket. Joy danced in Hugh's veins; he scarcely felt his hurts in the delightful certainty that Felida lived, and yet —and yet—was she a female rascal? That was the question which insensibly occupied Hugh's mind as soon as he knew she had not decided on being a corpse. For it is a moral certainty that, however loudly we may bewail our dead to-day, we should, were they miraculously restored to us, harry them up as severely as ever long before to-morrow night.

He sat down in the summer-house, and, looking sadly at the girl's scattered work, began to think. Was Felida indeed this man's wife? Was the spontaneous, vividly happy life in the mere present that she had seemed to live the result of a deliberate resolve to shut out memory and an inconvenient past? Had she resolved to be happy at

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all costs? Or was it possible, thought Hugh, thrilled by a sudden cold horror, that this profound indifference in the girl meant madness, instead of a sternly-enforced and brutal forgetfulness? Impossible! she was no more mad than criminal. A thousand traits of goodness and purity of nature recalled themselves to his mind, and her character had unrolled itself before him like the open pages of a delightful book to be read with ever-increasing admiration and pleasure.

Was it not far more likely that this man was mad, or the victim of some fancied resemblance in Felida to his missing wife? Hugh recalled the girl's blank look of amazement, of repudiation and disgust, her failure to recognise the dog—but now Hugh paused, for animals so seldom make mistakes of identity, men so often—and where was the ring that was said to have been placed on her finger, and of which she denied all knowledge?

And yet he had been in earnest—terribly

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in earnest—as his attempt to kill her proved.

The gnawing pain of torn flesh, hitherto unheeded in the excitement, now became more poignant, and the doctor's voice, calling him from the distance, was responded to with eagerness.

"Felida?" he exclaimed on his entrance.

"She has had a narrow escape," said the doctor, frowning, "a few seconds more of pressure on the windpipe, and"—he spread out his hands expressively. "The muscles of her throat are injured, and she is suffering severely from shock; but she will recover. And now for you," he added brusquely.

Not a word was exchanged between the two men while Hugh's hurts were examined, or during the exceedingly bad quarter of an hour that followed.

"Might have been worse," grunted the doctor when the burning business was over, "and may be worse yet. You'd better run over to Paris and see Pasteur. How did it happen?" he added abruptly.

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"I was sitting in the garden," Hugh nodded in its direction.

"And how the devil, sir, came you to have business in my garden?"

"I wanted a rose," said Hugh coolly.

"Who can hide a woman!" cried the doctor with a sardonic sneer. "Go on—and you found Felida. How long ago?"

"A fortnight!"

"A fornight!" M. le Docteur turned pale through his dark skin, with positive fear in his eyes as he looked at the fair, straight-limbed, sunny-haired young man before him.

"And she fell in love with you?" he said in a flat voice.

"Not at all."

"And you?" flashed out the doctor,

"I? She is very charming," he said.

The French doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Opportunity is the thief of virtue," he said.

"Sir!" cried Hugh furiously.

"Put that in your English copy-books,"

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said the doctor imperturbably. "With us, we give no opportunities, so none are taken. *Voilà tout!* Safe bind, safe find. You see, I know your English reedles."

"I see that you insult the young lady and me too," said Hugh angrily. "But is she married? Was that man her husband?"

"Yes."

Hugh uttered an exclamation of disgust, then cried, "But she denied him to his face," and briefly recapitulated the events of the morning.

"And may I ask," said the doctor, "what you and she were about, to so seriously arouse the ire of her excellent husband?"

"It was really most unfortunate," said poor Hugh, "but at that moment Felida happened to be on my knee. It was the first time such a thing had ever occurred"—he paused, and if he did not look a fool, certainly felt one.

"And what were you doing?" said the doctor with a whimsical air.

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"Oh, nothing!" said Hugh innocently. "It really wasn't my fault, or hers either, that just as she passed me, she should fall asleep."

"Fall asleep!" said the doctor, taking him up sharply. "Then that accounts for it," he muttered aside to himself.

"Yes," said Hugh, "suddenly, in one moment when she was actually standing up."

"What had you been saying to her?" said the doctor, swiftly. "Had you upset her in any way?"

"I only told her I was going away," began Hugh.

"Yes—go on," said the doctor, breathlessly.

"And she looked troubled, and got up, and almost immediately fell asleep."

"No wonder she did not know her husband," said the doctor; "and no wonder, too," he added, drily, "that at sight of so sweetly domestic an idyll he went a little mad, and his dog followed suit."

"But *what* is she?" cried Hugh, desperately; "a female villain—or—mad?"

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"Neither," said the doctor, deliberately lighting a cigarette; "her moral character and truth are above suspicion. Young man," he added abruptly, "you came to pluck a rose, and you have brought about a tragedy, for by this time I expect Felida's husband has destroyed himself."

"Then," cried Hugh, with energy, "it is his wife's doing; the moral, the truthful wife, who looked him full in the face and denied and drove him to madness. May God forgive her!"

"No doubt God will," said the doctor gravely, "for she is absolutely blameless. Sit down over there and hear her story; then condemn her if you dare."

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dered brain light was beginning to dawn. "You mean to tell me that Felida in one condition is absolutely ignorant of what Felida has done in the other?"

"I mean to say," said the doctor, "that you can realise her position by supposing that you have forgotten the last few days, or perhaps months, that they are absolutely torn out of your life, like a chapter from a book you are reading, and you may imagine the confusion and trouble such a blank would cause you. You yourself would be the same in your occupations, your habits, you would only entirely forget the things you had done, and the fresh persons, animals, etc., you had known in that state which you can't remember!"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Hugh, piously. "Why, one might get married, do fifty stupid things as an unconscious agent, and then be hauled up for it after?"

The doctor smiled in spite of himself.

"You interrupted me," he said, "let me

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continue. We left Felida there in what I may term her happy condition—a condition that at first lasted only a few hours, then by slow degrees (extending over a number of years) gradually grew into days, then into weeks, finally into months, so that at the present time Felida spends the major part of her existence in this second state. When she awakens from it, she goes through the same phase as when she falls into it; her head sinks, she falls into a torpor, then opens her eyes, and is in her ordinary existence. She continues her work with ardour, almost with vehemence, though if it is work undertaken during her recent state she knows nothing of it, and has to seek explanation concerning it as best she can, and bitterly deploring her unhappy state. A few moments before she has been singing a gay *chanson*, her family redemand it, but she ignores what they say; they remind her of a visit she has received, she has seen no one. This forgetfulness applies only to what has passed in her happy condition; any general

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idea acquired before is not affected, and she conducts her business and her life precisely as before. Psychologically, this character is most important, as in other known cases of doubling of life forgetfulness extends itself to all the past life, and comprises general ideas. Not to weary you, I will pass over the many interesting features in the case which I have for twelve years (she is now five-and-twenty) unremittingly watched, and pass to between three and four months ago, when a young man, a stranger to her family and herself, met her while she, in her second condition, was on a visit to friends, fell passionately in love with her, and gave her no peace till she promised to be his wife."

"She loved him?" said Hugh.

"Yes; but in a less degree. She accepted him, and in that she did no wrong, but she also deceived him, and the deception was Felida's, not mine. She has a morbid horror of speaking or hearing of her peculiarity (and has, indeed, from long practice become an

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adept at hiding it), and calls her normal state her 'right frame of mind,' oblivious of the relief and happiness she has found in the other. When she returned home she insisted that neither her family nor I should acquaint him with her misfortune, and as the marriage took place almost immediately, it so chanced that he was not undeceived. He was a merchant captain, as her father had been, and a month after the marriage he went away on a sea voyage, meaning to be absent a considerable time. When he had gone, she being still in her second condition, it occurred to me that if on awakening to her normal state she proved herself unconscious of an event that had shaken her nature to its very depths, she would present an incontestable proof of living an absolutely dual life. In her home there would be many things to remind her of her husband and awaken memory when she came to herself, and I wished her to have no such aids, and as she was willing to put herself entirely in my hands I brought her here as I

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have already told you, meaning to take her home again before her husband returned, though not, I fully hoped, before she had re-entered her normal state."

"It was bad behaviour to the husband," said Hugh gravely, "about as bad as could be. I call it a fraud to let a man marry a bright happy creature, as he thinks, only to find out afterwards she is a poor hysterical sufferer, morally and physically incapable of the duties of life."

"Do you?" said the doctor. "I don't. And but for you, young man, he would have found Felida in the condition in which he left her, and all would have gone well. You, by giving her a shock, probably of sorrow"—the doctor looked keenly at the young man—"roused her out of that state, and drove her back into her normal one, the sleep into which she fell being the link between the two conditions."

"Then she was not acting a part?" cried Hugh with intense relief; "she honestly be-

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lieved that she had never seen her husband before?"

"Most decidedly," said the doctor, "and the same with the dog: they were perfectly strange to her. On one occasion, in her second condition, she was returning in a fiacre from the funeral of a relation, when suddenly she felt coming on what she describes as her *access*, or normal state. She fell asleep for a few moments, awaking to find herself in a mourning carriage, absolutely ignorant of why she was there, and in the company of persons who vaunted the qualities of a defunct of whom she did not even know the name. On another occasion she lost consciousness in the street, and was succoured by the passers-by. Awaking in her other condition, she thanked them, laughing heartily, and those around naturally could not understand this singular gaiety. But to resume——"

"I have heard enough!" cried Hugh, starting up, "enough to make me sincerely

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pity that poor little soul, and to make me more sorry for *him*, and for my share in bringing about the catastrophe, than I ever was about anything in my life before. And another time you try experiments, I advise it not to be on human flesh and blood."

"Stay," said the doctor, laying his hand on the angry young man's arm; "you have heard me so far, and you shall hear the rest. As I have said, the case of Felida is one that has engaged the attention of the whole scientific world, and science is exact, and must have proof positive of everything advanced. I don't say that I have been disbelieved, but I wish to give incontestable proof, and it seemed to me a crucial point, that Felida could actually get married in her second condition, and absolutely forget it in her normal state, and I had arranged for certain English scientific men to come here and verify the fact for themselves. All this I explained to Felida, offering her the bribe I mentioned, and, as I had planned to take her home be-

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fore the return of her husband, she fell in with my plans very readily. I have now emphatically proved that it is a case of double life, or double conscience—what you will; and I hope," continued the doctor, with the ruthless indifference to human feeling that characterises the truly scientific man, "that you will not object to appearing at a society and relating exactly what you have seen?"

"I'll see you at the devil first!" burst out Hugh furiously, adding, as he rushed away, "and now I'm going to look for that poor fellow, and find him I will—living or dead!"

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CHAPTER XII.

"Awa, awa, thou traitor strang!
Out o' my sight soon mayest thou be!
I granted never a traitor's life,
And now I'll not begin wi' thee!"

HUGH never thought of the key till he reached the postern-door, so got over the wall as he had often done before, thinking of what a gulf lay between his last careless descent and his present one.

In the dusty road, the twilight all around him, veiling the scene that had come to be so familiar to him, he stood still to think.

There were three courses open to the man whom exceeding agony had hurried into crime—viz., to destroy himself, to revenge

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himself, or to get drunk—the last being the usual resource of a sailor in trouble.

The first seemed the more probable considering his passionate temperament, but Hugh rejected the suggestion, such unpleasantly cold qualms did it cause him, as being too cowardly a deed for so furious a person; while the second commended itself to him, as a scheme of revenge must bring the two men to close quarters, when an explanation of what seemed totally unexplainable could be given. The third hypothesis Hugh summarily rejected; however much to blame Felida might be, she would hardly marry a man of low tastes, and there was no occasion to beat up the pot-houses that abounded in the little towns lying right and left of the landslip.

Granted, then, that he need not search for a dead body, or scour the district for a living one, was he to sit down here in the road and wait until Nemesis in the person of Felida's husband came up with him? For revenge

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he might bring something stronger than his hands, and how easy for a man to hide himself in this rocky wilderness of trees and shrubs, and pot his quarry comfortably from out of sight.

Hugh looked keenly around him; it would soon be as nearly dark as a summer night ever is, but he remembered that there was a moon later. He remembered something else, too, that even his excitement could not make him forget—he was exceedingly hungry, and he was two miles from the nearest place where he could get food. To be sure there was plenty in the house behind him, but what man of proper pride, rushing forth on a self-imposed task of derring-do, was ever sneak enough to come creeping back to the larder to first satisfy his hunger, and give him courage?

So Hugh, having lit a cigar, set out without more ado for Regis, easily discernible in his white flannels at a considerable distance. If M. Felix were on the watch, he thought,

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with characteristic carelessness, he would probably be drawn on to follow him, and he must trust to that gentleman's sense of honour, if he carried firearms, not to shoot him in the back, or pick him off without giving at least a chance at retaliation. So, with erect bearing, and free, graceful step, the young man pursued his way, now showing clearly on some ascent, now sinking out of sight among the brushwood, but always making a bee-line across the broken ground, and always making a distinct landmark in the surrounding gloom. He never once looked back, but a man does not live three years in the Australian bush for nothing, and he had not left the cottage fifty paces when he knew that he was "shadowed." Yet where was the dog? Probably strangled, poor, faithful beast, lest his whereabouts should betray his master, and so Hugh's cruelly smarting hurts were avenged.

Had he turned, it is improbable that he would have seen this shadow, so vague was the light, and so easy was it to hide, but his

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indifference seemed the noblest courage to the poor wretch who believed his hands to be as those of Cain, and who was resolved to take yet another life before he squandered his own.

Gradually the moon rose: silvery fair and calm she rose over the sea, with that holiness she keeps for the sea alone, nor ever smiles with such divinity upon the restless earth, with its fever, and fret, and unquiet. In that light, the tall white-clad figure showed ever more and more clearly, and was easily tracked when the confines of the Landslip were reached, and passing along a path that wound round a copse, Hugh crossed a gate and a meadow, then another meadow, and followed a narrow path along the edge of a cliff that on one side sloped down to a vast field that in time of cowslips was one golden sheet of scented bloom.

Following this path you might at the end of it walk over an abyss into the sea, or pause a few steps from its edge and take the thread-

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like way that wound downwards past cliffs, and through meadows to the town, that lay snugly curled up with its harbour and cob wall in a natural hollow, its lights twinkling far below. A man may be brave without rashness, and at this dangerous point, where a man might meet life or death with indifferent ease, Hugh Valentine turned sharply, and saw a dark figure crouched down against the furze bushes that on one side lined the path.

In the broken Landslip how easily his shadow might have escaped him! But here, on this gorse-crowned summit, with only the far-away meadow below, they were in a *cul-de-sac*, and neither, without suicide, could get away from the other.

Swift as thought Hugh had retraced his steps, and laid his hand on the man's shoulder before the other even realised that he was discovered, or had made a movement to elude him.

"Why do you follow as an enemy one who

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is your friend?" said Hugh, rapidly in French.

The man sprang up, flinging off his grasp with a fury that would have sent Hugh clean over the edge of the path had he not been on the lookout for it, and already twisted one hand in the gorse bushes, while with the other he struck down something that gleamed brightly in the moonlight.

"We're face to face now," hissed out the Frenchman, in the same language, struggling to free his arm; "if you had stood another second outside that wall I should have shot you like the dog that you are, but you turned your back, and you were safe. Now——" he tried to clutch Hugh's throat with his free hand, but the Englishman's great stature stood him in good stead, and he drew himself easily out of reach of his assailant.

"Have you not done enough strangling for to-day?" he cried coldly, then suddenly forced open the man's fingers, and jerked

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out the pistol, that fell some eighty feet below.

"You are not to be trusted with it," he said, composedly. "Do you suppose that I didn't know you were behind me all the time?"

"You're a brave man," said the other, grudgingly, his dark olive-skinned face deformed by the hell burning in his heart; "but you are not too brave to steal a man's wife from him behind his back, and debase, ruin, and make of her a vile——"

Hugh's hand, clapped suddenly on the man's mouth, silenced the voice that had risen to a mad shriek.

"Silence!" he thundered, in a voice that might have been heard far out at sea, and with that trumpet-note of truth which carries conviction with it. "She is your faithful wife, and as innocent a woman as God ever made!"

"My faithful wife!" The poor wretch gibbered the words after Hugh. "Asleep

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in your arms—upon your knee! Oh, tell me I am mad, mad! My faithful wife, who *denied* me, who said over and over again, 'I have never seen you before—never!' who thrust away even my dog, who loved her—my poor dog, whom but now I slew because he also loved *me* so much he would not leave me!"

"See here," cried Hugh, who was now more calm, "call her and me whatever you please, but first be man enough to give me two minutes' speech with you. Can't you control yourself sufficiently for that?" he added sharply.

Those who possess least self-control always pride themselves most upon it, Frenchmen especially, and this one was stung into a supreme effort by Hugh's words.

"Say on," he said, sullenly, drawing a little apart, as if mere contact with the other were loathsome to him; but Hugh did not immediately speak, and for a moment on that lofty summit, with only sea and sky within

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their view, they stood still looking at each other hesitation in the eyes of the one, mistrust and doubt in those of the other.

After all, it takes a lot of explaining to a man that his finding his wife asleep on your knee is the purest accident, and Hugh felt its awkwardness keenly, even while the humour of the situation (for ever does farce intrude itself on tragedy) so appealed to him that he only just saved himself from bursting into unseemly mirth.

"M. le Feuvre," he said, "mine is a difficult task, and one which the doctor could far better discharge than I."

"M. le Docteur! And what has he to do with it? And pray, did I find her in *his* arms or yours?" flashed out the Frenchman like forked lightning.

"Unhappily, in mine," said Hugh gravely, and turning so manly and honourable a face on his interlocutor as for the moment to abash him. "Your wife, in the act of passing me, fell asleep, and would have fallen had

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I not supported her. Almost in the same moment you appeared, and——"

A peal of laughter, violent as of a mocking devil, interrupted Hugh's little "explanation," discomposing him mightily.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the goblin shouts rang out wilder and wilder, and Hugh, a little off his centre, and forgetting his mortification, actually found himself at last joining in heartily.

His mirth quenched his companion's. The Frenchman's jaw dropped; for a moment he gazed at the Englishman with fear, since, no matter how mad a person may be himself, he usually disapproves of madness in anybody else.

"Can't you find some better lie to tell me than that?" he said, his features convulsed and deformed by passion. "Am I a *fool*, a child, think you, to swallow such a tale as that? Scoundrel, *coquin*, *liar!*" he thundered out, and fell upon Hugh like a madman for the second time that evening.

"You!" he cried in gasps as he struggled

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with Hugh, "defiler of innocence, robber of my hearth, shall such as you be left to do more of the devil's work unpunished?"

"You are a fool," said Hugh, exercising his whole strength so suddenly as to free himself from the man and throw him to a distance, "and I won't tell you another syllable to pull you out of the hell your own bad passions have flung you into."

And without another word he went swiftly away, disappearing almost immediately down the steep path at the side of the cliff. The Frenchman stood perfectly still, all the passion, noble in itself, gone out of him, a fell, cowardly, cruel resolve taking birth in his heart.

"A life for a life," he said, looking up to the starlit sky with eyes that had murder in them, then swiftly followed the path that Hugh had taken.

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CHAPTER XIII.

"She lookit o'er her left shoulder,
To hide the tear stood in her 'ee;
'Now fare ye well,' young Beichan,' she says,
'I'll try to think nae mair on thee.'"

M. LE DOCTEUR rose early, and while breakfast was preparing walked for a while in his kitchen garden, which indeed combined many advantages, as you could cut a salad there, or gather a rose with equal ease.

He was not romantic, the scientific man seldom is, so he chose the salad and carried it in to be dressed, then he examined the fruit, and finally paused opposite the pyramid of flower-pots, and scowled at them as if he hoped and expected they would return the compliment.

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"A rose!" he said aloud; "don't tell me that it was only a rose that brought that young man over the wall—it was her pretty face, of course; more fool I to suppose a man could ever build anything without a woman's making up her mind to see what was on the other side! Of course she peeped, and as good as asked him in. Climb the highest staircase in the world, they say, and you will find a woman at the top of it! And he came over, of course, and if he were not a young aristocrat of the best quality there would have been serious mischief—though to be sure bad's the best of the business now. And after she had given me her solemn promise not to look at, or speak to a soul while I was away! But even when a woman tries to run straight, she never does."

He paused, and looked at the rows of cabbages, now dressed in kingly robes of sparkling dew.

"If you only knew it," he said, apostrophising them, "you have been the critics in

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the stalls, spectators of a drama that any playwright might be proud of conceiving. The sleeping wife, wearing the garb of a wanton, in the young man's arms, the betrayed husband rushing on the unconscious pair, her cold-blooded denial of him, and his furious attempt to choke the life out of her lying throat, the wild man-and-beast struggle, and lastly, his crime committed, the husband rushing away to suicide or—revenge."

The doctor paused again, a look of concern flitting across the calmness of his features.

"I should be sorry if anything happened to that young fellow," he muttered, "but it was a reckless thing to do, to cross that wall with a probable murderer hanging about outside and plenty of cover in which to hide. Fortunately there was a moon last night, and I heard no shots. If it came to mere fists, I would back the Englishman against Felix. Poor Felix! It's rough on him: but if a man marries a case interesting to the whole

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world of science he must take the consequences. True, he didn't know; for it's 'for better, for worse,' and if he is alive she'll make him happy yet."

He walked to the postern door, opened it, and looked out. Bright and beautiful the sea burst upon his view, wild and fresh as no rushing inland water can ever be, and he drew a deep breath of enjoyment, purely physical, but very satisfying for all that.

His eye followed the picturesque rise and fall of the broken ground, over which Nature had so tenderly thrown her many-tinted mantle of green, and rested on the distant ridge, sharp against the skyline, on the edge of which the two men had met the night before.

A dangerous place for a man to walk with an enemy behind him. He made a movement as if to approach it, but a prudent thought of breakfast drew him back, and he walked a few steps in the opposite direction instead.

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He had not gone far when a dark object, huddled up at the base of a rock, some yards away, fixed his attention. It was something human, he saw at a glance, and it was dead. He went close up to it, and uttered an exclamation.

"Felix's dog," he said, turning it over, "strangled. That means revenge—revenge to which he sacrificed what he loved best on earth, next to Felida. Poor beast!" He let fall the handsome head, with its piteous look of wonder, of reproach, in its convulsed features. "Had you not been faithful, even to a murderer, you would be living now."

He turned his back on the dog, looking lightly and apprehensively along the way Hugh had taken, as if there might be something there he did not wish to see.

"After breakfast," he said, retracing his steps to the garden, "after breakfast I will seek him. A hungry man does no good work, and even at this distance, I think I smell coffee."

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But he was not to get that coffee just yet, for he spied approaching him in the flesh, the very person of whose possible corpse he had a moment ago been thinking.

"M. le Docteur!" shouted Hugh from a distance, "I have news—news! He is not dead, he wishes only to kill *me*—and I fancy he's bobbing about somewhere in the distance now. How is she?"

The Frenchman spread out his hands in satisfaction even while he winced under Hugh's French, which was grammatically accurate, but with an accent that you might cut.

"Good!" he said in his pure Parisian, "and you are well able to take care of yourself. When he has calmed down a little, we will explain."

"As well explain to a mad bull," said Hugh, impatiently, who bore signs of hurry, and who had indeed run nearly the whole way, so that he might get back in time for his uncle's breakfast-table. "But the

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beggar will suffer a bit, for he doesn't know that he hasn't killed Felida."

"Did you call her that to his face?" said M. le Docteur drily, "if so——"

"No. How *is* she?"

"Recovering. She has forgotten all about you, all about yesterday, hasn't the least idea she is married—though she knew it well enough, the jade, all the while she was encouraging your visits."

"It was only because she was dull, and wanted company," said Hugh, feeling nevertheless some disappointment in Felida, and thinking her conduct disingenuous compared with Dosia's proud truthfulness of character, "I never thought to ask her if she were married, any more than she asked *me* questions about myself."

The Frenchman raised his eyebrows.

"And are you married too?" he said.

"No, but I hope to be some day."

"Ah! I wish you happiness. Excuse me, but my breakfast is waiting—and I have

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had an anxious night. If you can bring Captain le Feuvre with you, a reasonable man, back to his wife, I shall be glad to see you. Otherwise——"

Hugh's face fell.

"I should have liked to see her," he said "poor little girl, we were such friends"—and indeed to his life's end he kept a corner of his heart for the blithe comrade whose acquaintance with him had begun in sunshine and ended in darkest storm.

"When you bring her husband," said M. le Docteur inexorably, with his hand on the door, "until then, I appeal to your honour not to attempt to enter this place, or approach her."

He shut and locked the door smartly, then turned to meet Felida, neatly dressed as usual, but pale, and with white bandages round her throat.

Her hands were full of work; she looked distressed and unhappy as she hurried towards him.

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"Oh, M. le Docteur," she cried in a dolorous voice, and in French, "why am I here, and what has happened to me? Where are my brothers and sisters, and where my mother? Often as I have been"—she hesitated over the word—"strange—before, I have always come to myself at home—among my own people. I am frightened, Monsieur, frightened."

And she wept in a crushed, helpless way that moved him to pity, but before he could speak, she said, holding her skirts to him:

"See how I am dressed! It is absurd for a mere *couturiere.* What would my clients say if they beheld me thus? My clients—alas! I have forgotten the orders they gave me, and there is no one here as at home, to put me *au courant* with everything. If you were not here, Monsieur, I think I should go mad with fear—it is all like one bad horrible nightmare—since I woke yesterday with that strange man shouting at me, and crying out that I was his wife. There was another man

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there too"—she put her hand in bewilderment to her head—"whom I had never seen before, and he tried to save me when that madman seized me by the throat. Oh, my God! I can feel that agony and the very bitterness of death yet!"

She shuddered as she touched the bandages, and looked as if she would fall.

"Then there was the dog"—she gazed affrightedly around her—"I thought he would have killed that gentleman, and I could not even cry out; and I came to myself in a strange room, with an old woman tending me whom I had never seen before!"

"Calm yourself, my child," said the doctor, soothingly, and guiding her towards the house, and breakfast; "you are safe now, in my care, and no one shall harm you, *petite*."

"But I want to go home," she said restively; "all my work is waiting for me, and what will my clients say?"

"That one must breakfast wherever one is," said the doctor, as they neared the house.

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"But how do you come here?" she said, in a dissatisfied tone. "I left you in Auvergne; you were crossing the square to get into your carriage, and when I saw you last night I thought"—she hesitated—"that I must be still 'strange.'"

"Come to breakfast," said the doctor, cheerily, "and let us talk after."

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CHAPTER XIV.

"But how shall I your true-love find,
Or how should I her knaw?
I bear a tongue ne'er wid her spak,
An eye that ne'er her saw."

"So Mr. Treherne is at Seamouth?" said Mr. Bellew to his nephew, after breakfast, as they smoked their cigarettes in the billiard-room, "at least Dunster, who knows everybody's business, told me last night. I shall now be able to gratify my curiosity about Miss Dosia."

"You mean to go over?" said Hugh, beginning to knock the balls about.

"Yes. This afternoon. You can drive the bay mare."

"Very sorry, sir, but I can't. Miss Dosia and I have quarrelled."

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"Pooh! Anyway, I haven't with her father —nor have you either, I imagine."

"No, but I would rather you excused me, sir."

"Only I shan't," said Mr. Bellew testily, his healthy old apple cheeks growing pinker at this opposition. "I particularly want to know what Treherne thinks about the Irish land bill. And how can I go without you? I'll order the T-cart and Sally to be ready at three o'clock sharp. So that's why you've looked so glum the last two days, eh?"

"O, I've been all right."

"She'll think none the worse of you, man, for going back. A woman's worst fury is roused by the sight of a man's back. The moment he shows his face, she's happy."

"Do you think so, sir?" said Hugh, laughing.

"I'm sure of it. Neglect, absence, they're the only two things that ever kill a woman's love—it survives everything else."

"Well, sir, don't blame me if we get a cool

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reception. Perhaps Miss Dosia has reported me to her parents, and found me wanting."

"Not she," said Mr. Bellew robustly. "Go and look in the glass, or, better still, in your mind and heart, boy, and if you can honestly say she'll do better than you, why let her."

Hugh flushed.

"You think much too well of me," he said, putting his hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Haven't I had the bringing up of you?" said Mr. Bellew, "and am I not praising my own work? And this Dosia Treherne's a wonderful girl, if she turns up her nose at you."

"I think she is," said Hugh, with a sudden change in his voice that told his uncle volumes.

"I never expected you to fall in love with a commonplace woman," said Mr. Bellew. "Now those girls out there"—he nodded towards the distant garden—"are good girls, pretty girls, but no man of sense would want to make a life-partner of either of them. I

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never met," said Mr. Bellew, deliberately and reflectively, "one who was. Of all the lovely, admirable, good women I have ever known, there is not one to whom I could honestly have said, 'I will cleave to you, and you only, till death us do part.' You may want a thing very passionately and urgently at one period of your life, that you won't want in the least at another. And boys won't believe that time brings change of taste, change of everything —but Shakespeare has explained that better than I can."

Hugh, pale beneath the pain of those wounds for which he had been bidden to seek M. Pasteur's aid, made no reply.

He thought his uncle's views selfish and mean, and he felt within himself the power to be the one husband of one wife, for his nature was constant, and he was something more than a merely honourable man.

Many a man who thinks he can lay claim to that title goes to the altar, swearing to love and cherish and cling to his wife, when, if

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he said "mistress," it would be nearer the mark.

Hugh was not one to rush into bonds lightly, or choose where he might look for disappointment, but he would not be likely to tire easily of such bondage—indeed, it may be allowed that women are the first to realise that they are chained for life, and to fight wildly, if invisibly, against their gyves.

"You look cut up," said Mr. Bellew, slapping him on the shoulder. "Cheer up! But I won't congratulate you till I've seen her. Going down into the town, eh? I won't come, I've letters to write. Ta-ta. Why, how the boy limps," he added as Hugh went away, bound on a secret errand to the doctor of the place.

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CHAPTER XV.

"Her gait it was graceful, her body was straight,
And her countenance free from pride."

THE Red House was all flashing and winking with life, as usual, when Hugh drove his uncle up to the door, but among the many faces adorning the many windows, he did not see Dosia's.

The children shouted with delight at the satin-skinned, high-stepping mare, and while some loudly hailed Hugh as an old friend, others made audible inquiries as to who his companion might be, one impudent little voice boldly accosting him as "Old Pippin."

"Mr. Treherne was at home," they all announced, and indeed that fact was patent to the meanest observation as he reclined, sound asleep, on an easy-chair in front of the

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dining-room window, from long habit sleeping through a turmoil that would have driven an ordinary man crazy.

When Mr. Bellew, kissing his hand to the prettiest of the little girls, had descended, Hugh asked if he should drive the cart round to the stables, but a groom just then appearing, Hugh had no choice but to follow his uncle and the maid-servant in.

One would not think it likely that a middle-aged gentleman, caught fast asleep, would have the courage, on being awakened, to shout "Not at home" in the face of his advancing visitors, yet this is precisely what Colonel Treherne, a very Job in the bosom of his own family, did.

Mr. Bellew got very red, and Hugh laughed as he came forward.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he said, "to disturb you, but my uncle, Mr. Bellew, thought he'd like to come over and have a chat with you about politics——"

"Oh! it's Valentine!" exclaimed Colonel

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Treherne, his good humour, mightily reinforced by a sound sleep, returning, "very glad to see you both," and he shook hands cordially with the pair.

Very soon the two elders were deep in discussion, and their opinions being emphatically those of all good country gentlemen, they became so pally that Hugh presently found with genuine alarm, that they were going to remain the rest of the afternoon, dine, and drive back to Regis afterwards.

Five hours at the very least, thought the perplexed young man, of either avoiding Dosia, or Dosia avoiding him. He had meant, at least, to allow an interval to elapse in his wooing, and considering the terms upon which they had parted the day before yesterday, his mere presence in the house was at least a gross violation of good taste.

If he had known that at that very moment he and Felida were photographed on Dosia's memory, in the precise attitude which had made a raving maniac of Felix, then I think

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this young man would have fled incontinently, and gone on fleeing until he had taken steps to assuage her wrath.

But he did not know, and presently went out to look for her in rather a devil-may-care mood, to be sure, for he was still as rooted as ever in his right not to give explanations, and thought that if Dosia loved him as he her, she would believe in him, no matter what flagitious testimony there might be against him. And the pain of the torn muscles in his legs was very great, and he wanted some one to pity him and be good to him, as Felida —poor little soul—had been to him when it was only his heart that ached.

Perhaps Dosia would be sorry, he thought, if Felix potted him after all, for he did not underrate the danger from this desperate man, who believed that his hands were red with his wife's blood, while counting Hugh as the precipitating cause of the crime, and to be punished accordingly.

That Felix would not go to the cottage,

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Hugh felt certain, till in his old wild way he had revenged her. There must be hell in that man's heart to-day, thought Hugh, as he limped to a seat on the slope that led to the gingerbread castle and cast his eyes here and there in search of Dosia.

But perhaps Onny had warned her, for though he lingered abroad a long time, guessing rightly that she would not be found in the house till the last minute, he searched in vain, and it was close on seven when he entered the Red House, and Colonel Treherne took him up to his room to make himself tidy for dinner.

Then they went into the big, pleasant drawing-room, on the same floor, a room in which the odour of old roses lingered, and fresh ones rioted, and where Mrs. Treherne sat talking to his uncle.

She greeted Hugh so pleasantly that he saw she had heard nothing, and he said to himself, "good little girl," approvingly, while she asked:

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"Where's Dosia?" as if she expected them to come in together.

And when Dosia came, immediately preceding the servant announcing dinner, her greeting was no colder, no shyer, than is that of many a young girl to her lover before other people; but Mr. Bellew looked at her in a way that Hugh understood, and the young man flushed with vexation for his beloved.

For she had never appeared to less advantage than at that moment. It was the soul of Dosia, the spontaneity, the charm, that made her so truly delightful, and to-night the soul in her was dead, and all about her, even to her exquisite skin, seemed dulled also.

But at table—a round one—where she sat beside Hugh, facing the window, the town-bred girl's training came in, and she made conversation with the uncle and nephew easily and gracefully, with a touch too of that wit for which she was well known, so that to an outsider the party at the rose-shaded table in the cheerful room would have appeared a

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merry and happy one, and Hugh as happy as the rest.

But even if she dared to smile at him, he knew how entirely unapproachable she had made herself, and that the most sullen silence, or the wildest rudeness, would have been of better omen to him than the glancing, bright friendliness she accorded him.

So superficially indeed did she notice him, that his extreme pallor passed unobserved, and gradually she left the conversation almost entirely to the men, becoming engrossed in something puzzling and mysterious in the rose garden on the other side of the road, and for which she could not readily account.

The window was widely opened, as usual, and through it the light streamed across the road, throwing patches of brightness on the grass, while leaving the corners and back of the garden in deep shadow.

Something was moving out there, not one of the children, who were all either in bed or at supper—something dark, and—Dosia could

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hardly tell why—the presence of danger to some one in that brightly-lit room from some one hidden outside, took strong possession of her mind.

She slipped away so quietly when dessert began, that the two elder men, deep in politics, did not even miss her, and when Mrs. Treherne, scenting something wrong, almost as noiselessly followed her daughter, Hugh was left alone, a fair target enough to the eyes of any person looking in from without.

He was toying idly with his fruit, in much bodily pain, and out of heart now he recognised how impossible Dosia was of pacification, when a sharp report rang suddenly out, and a bullet whizzed past his head, and smashed a large mirror behind him.

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CHAPTER XVI.

"So love did vanish with my state,
Which now my soul repents too late."

At the same moment furious cries and the sound of a struggle were heard in the road, and the three men rushed out to find Dosia in her white gown fighting like grim death to wrench a pistol from the hand of a man in sailor clothes—Felix le Feuvre.

To disarm him was, with Hugh, the work of a moment, and then he shook him like a rat, and could have killed him in his fury, when Dosia, bruised, her hair unbound, the bosom of her muslin gown in rags, staggered, and would have fallen had not Colonel Treherne caught her.

"Coward! *Scelerat!*" he cried in his best British-French. "Isn't killing *one* woman enough for you?"

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He dragged him into the house, and they made a strangely tragic group in the cheerful hall, and then Hugh bound the hands of the man, who was by now foaming at the mouth, and indeed three parts mad, with lust of blood, and hunger, and agony.

"Look you," cried the bound man, addressing the company at large, and which was considerably augmented by all the servants and a perfect Jacob's ladder of chubby white figures on the stairs, "he has stolen me wife, he has debauched her, ruined her. I find her actually sitting on his knee—asleep, and on his knee! and I kill her, and then I go for to kill him also! I see him sitting in honour at table with a beautiful young lady beside him—I see him look at her with eyes of love—and she, *she* lies unburied yet! And I lift my hand to shoot, and this brave young English mees steals close up beside me, just as I have my hand on the trigger, and she jerks my hand, yes, and I miss my aim. And when I would fire again, she fights me like a

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man—yes—just like a man! And so your *vilain* life is spared, and you will do more mischief, while Felida——" the man's voice broke, and he fell into wild and awful weeping.

All this poured out in a torrent of French was entirely unintelligible to any one present save Hugh and Dosia, and as swiftly their eyes met. The boundless wrath, the absolute renunciation of him that spoke in her glance might have daunted a bolder and less innocent man than he, yet told how through her heart there ran a sharp and cruel pang at the fall of this man whom she loved . . . . She had credited him with obstinacy, folly even, but had clung to the hope that he would clear himself, and now, how much worse was the truth than her wildest imaginations could have compassed! Without a word she untied the cord with rapid fingers, and flung it far away from her, then drew herself up to her fullest height and turned upon Hugh.

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Her eyes shone like stars, her glorious hair hung in masses against the bared, drifted snow of her shoulders and bosom, it was with the gesture of a queen that she said in a vibrating voice:

"He is unarmed now—and you, sir, have the use of your fists, I suppose, as well as he. Father," she went on, and Colonel Treherne looked at her as if he no longer knew her as his child, "do not judge this man till you have heard his story. He is starving, he is half-mad, he has been betrayed" (the scorn of her eyes would have drunk up Hugh's very soul if he had been as guilty as she supposed), "and I know not what sins he has committed in his despair, but now he needs taking care of," and she led him away.

"What a splendid girl!" cried Mr. Bellew warmly as he followed, thrilled by Dosia as by an electric shock, "and what a beauty too—and what a *heart*! But I say, Hugh," he added in his nephew's ear, "what have you done to offend her?"

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She drew the distraught man into a quiet room at the back of the house, and snatching up a shawl with which to cover her shoulders, made a sign to her father to keep the others away.

"Ask them to bring some bread and wine," she said. When it came, she fed the now cowed, trembling man as if he had been a child, very slowly too, for he had clearly not broken his fast for many hours, and in point of fact during the two days and a half of his vigilant watch on Hugh, the poor wretch had not once broken bread.

Gradually his eyes grew less wild, and gratitude touched them as with healing dew.

"Why are you so good to me?" he said with trembling lips. "I am a murderer, and should have committed a second murder to-night but for you, and in my madness I turned on you also—coward that I am!"

Then recurring suddenly to the one, the burning thought of his heart,

"*Felida!*" he cried in anguish, "*Felida!*"

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Hugh came forward abruptly. He was pale, and the expression of his eyes and mouth were stern.

"You can do him no more good now," he said coldly, addressing Dosia, "leave him to me—I can heal him."

But at sound of his voice Felix started up, with the face of a devil, and an uplifted arm.

"Keep still," said Hugh curtly, "I will speak, and you *shall* hear me. Will you retire?" he said to Dosia.

"No," she said quietly. "When he is quiet, when he is safe, I will leave him, not before."

The little group by the door wavered, knowing hardly whether to go or stay, a little restive at being kept out in the cold, and unable to grasp the situation, because they could not follow the Frenchman's rapid talk.

"Father," said Dosia, going up to him, "will you not take Mr. Bellew and mother away? Mr. Valentine has something to say to—to this man—something that he seems to think will do him good."

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They murmured, objected, but finally the little crowd melted away, leaving the two men and Dosia together.

Felix staggered to the open window as if he needed air, and Hugh followed, and stood beside him.

"Now then," he said sharply, "you have to listen to me, even if I have to hold you down while I do it. You would not believe me last night when I tried to tell you the truth about your wife, and if you don't believe me now, go to M. le Docteur, who will corroborate every word I say."

"*He!*" hissed Felix, drawing back as far as possible from Hugh's hated person, "the wretch in whose charge I left her, whom you have bought with your English gold, and made your tool? Never!"

"But I say you *shall*. To be brief, then. You have been deceived about your wife."

"*Mon Dieu*," cried the Frenchman hotly, "is this your explanation—you admit it?"

"I did not say that *I* had deceived you,"

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said Hugh calmly, his face like a marble mask from pure physical pain, "it is the Doctor, and your wife's family who allowed you to marry your wife in ignorance of her state and health and history."

"A history!" snarled the Frenchman, "what history has a young unmarried French *filette?* It is only your English misses who——"

"Silence!" thundered Hugh, intensely conscious of a figure in the background; "her health-history, I mean. I tell you she has been subject from childhood to curious fits of sleep, and total loss of memory, extending over weeks and even months, and that in one state of existence she does not know or remember anything that has passed in the other. If she denied you yesterday, she will just as easily deny that she knows *me* to-morrow."

"How can she deny anything?" said Felix, beginning to tremble exceedingly, "did I not strangle her," gripping Hugh's

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arm and speaking in a faint hoarse whisper, "is she not *dead?*"

"You partly strangled her, certainly," said Hugh, "but she is not dead;" and to the poor wretch who heard, his voice was as the voice of an angel come down to the nethermost hell to save his soul alive.

"Not dead!" he said. "Not dead!" he repeated, in an ecstasy, and babbled words, childish words of endearment, pleading for forgiveness. Then cruel memory thrust aside his brief joy, awakening him to torment.

"If she be innocent," he said, "and suffers from this strange forgetfulness, why is she here alone with you, instead of in the home where I placed her, among her own people?"

"Ask M. le Docteur," said Hugh, promptly, "he brought her here, and it was only by merest accident I made her acquaintance. And I give you my word of honour," said the young fellow heartily, "that I have never said one word of love to her, nor she to me,

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and if no man ever wrongs you more than I have done, you may make yourself happy."

Felix thrust the dark hair from his brow, and lifted his haggard face, aged ten years by that terrible day, to the ineffable peace and majesty of the blue and silver sky without. How it seemed to rebuke him, but how it stilled him too, and the wild, restless, tortured spirit seemed for a moment to merge itself in that lovely illimitable space!

Slowly his gaze came back to Hugh's face, and he drew a sharp, sudden breath.

"Will you shake hands with me?" he said, humbly. "I can't say I rightly understand it all yet; but I feel sure of one thing—that you've done her and me no harm; and of another thing—that my sinful hands have not killed her. And for the present—that's enough for me."

Their hands met in a cordial grip.

"I meant to kill you," said Felix, "and I should have done it too, but for the young lady, God bless her! And now you'll take

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me to Felida? I should not dare "—he hung his head—" to go alone."

"Not to-night," said Hugh decisively, for he had work of his own to do before he slept, "Be outside the door in the wall at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, and you'll find me there."

"Felida! Felida!" cried Felix, with delirious joy; then, as if the house were too small to contain him and his rapture, would have rushed out into the night.

But Hugh stayed him.

"There is much yet to tell you," he said, and compelled him to hearken while he repeated as nearly as possible word for word all the doctor had given him of Felida's case.

He had two hearers to convince, not one, but there are some things that a woman can never be made to understand, though she will fathom others that are beyond a man's most brilliant comprehension.

And how Felida, whether asleep or awake, came to be sitting on Hugh's knee without

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Hugh's aiding and abetting her was just one of those things, so that when Felix had departed, and Hugh turned with throbbing heart to seek Dosia, she was gone.

. . . . . .

An hour later, Hugh, with hat rammed down over his eyes, and face as white as chalk, was sending the mare along at the rate of twenty miles an hour along the road to Regis, while Mr. Bellew's eulogies of Dosia kept pace with their speed.

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CHAPTER XVII.

"'If I would help thee now,' he said,
It were a deadly sin."

HUGH pushed the postern door open and slipped in, followed by the trembling figure of Felix. He saw in a moment that Felida was there, at her old place in the summer-house, her work spread out before her, her needle flying in and out with a species of rage, as if she could not make it fly fast enough.

She had left the doctor over his breakfast, and hurried out here to make the most of her time, and indeed, so engrossed was she, that she did not even look up as the two men approached her, and then only because they were keeping the light from her work.

Dull and pale, all the soul of her gone, it

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was but a little French *ouvriere* who looked up at them, turning deadly pale at the sight, and moving as if to fly, only to fall back with a helpless cry of fear that wrung Felix's heart.

"Felida," he cried, falling on his knees before her, forgetful of all Hugh's coaching, and that he was to approach her as a stranger, "forgive me; yesterday I was mad—I who would not willingly hurt a hair of your head!"

He kissed the fold of her gown, and she drew it away, casting a pitiful look around as if seeking a friend to protect her; but Hugh's face, full of tenderness, was strange to her also, and her gaze went past him, so that he too felt a pang at being so entirely forgotten.

"Don't be a fool," he said, in an energetic whisper to Felix as he dragged him up; "can't you see she is frightened to death? The doctor should have prepared her first."

He thrust him on one side and said:

"Mademoiselle, we are intruding upon you. Is Monsieur le Docteur within?"

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She looked at him, her eyes dwelling with a sense of pleasure on his face. Her own softened, and she exclaimed in French :

"Ah! I do remember you now; you did save me yesterday."

Hugh smiled. The two young faces looking at each other had so satisfied, so sweet, so comely an air, that a sharp twinge of jealousy dug its talon into Felix's heart, and almost stopped his breath.

"It was a terrible mistake," said Hugh, "and he is heartbroken about it. Will you not forgive him?" he added, gently, his earnest eyes glowing deep and blue as sapphires beneath his crown of close-cropped golden curls.

"Poor man!" said Felida, swayed by that gentle pleading. "He has come from losing his wife, I suppose," she added in a whisper, "and he thought I was she!"

"Did I hurt you very much, my Felida, my poor, little one?" burst out the artless Felix, carried away by his longing to take her

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in his arms and kiss those cruel marks made by his fingers.

"Go and fetch M. le Docteur," said Hugh, imperiously; but a devil was rising in Felix's heart, and he did not stir.

"Here he comes?" exclaimed Hugh, and Felix turned to see the portly shape, well-dressed, well-shaved, well-breakfasted, and perfectly contented with what it was, and what it beheld, coming slowly down the garden path, lighting a cigar as it came.

The sight angered Felix, and for the moment he forgot Felida. Rushing to meet the doctor, he cried:

"Ah, monsieur! Is it thus you have rewarded the trust I placed in you?"

"You are a little excited, Felix," said the doctor comfortably, "but I am glad to see you." (As indeed he was, though he had never expected to have that pleasure again.) "But don't you think, my friend, that before blaming me you have a little account to settle with your wife? I had no wish to deceive

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you as to the state of Felida's health—quite the contrary. I even urged her and her family to make you acquainted with a state of things that you must inevitably, and perhaps disagreeably, find out."

"If they deceived me—if Felida"—the man's voice faltered—"did so also, it was for you to tell me the truth; and do you suppose it would make any difference to me? Only I should have watched over her, taken care of her, or seen that she was never without some one to do so; and," he added, with a touch of sternness, "I would never have left her in your charge."

The doctor put out two fingers and patted the young man on the shoulder.

"Console yourself," he said; "you have married a woman who is a subject of interest to the whole scientific world, and who has absorbed valuable years of my time and study—years that I do not even grudge. If you at first find these absences of memory a little awkward——"

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"Awkward!" repeated Felix, vivaciously. "Look you," he exclaimed with feeling, "I am a man who must always be much away from my wife. Am I to have to woo her over again every time I come home, or possibly return to find she has fallen in love with somebody else in my absence?"

He turned to look at the two standing by the arbour, and the doctor looked also.

Hugh Valentine had brought out from the interior the sketching tools he had left there when so rudely disturbed on the previous day, and Felida, her work neglected, was glancing down at them idly, unaware that she had ever seen them before. Suddenly she looked up, and at him. Was it only gratitude, or some struggling memory that dawned in her soft, dark eyes, drawing Felix jealously back to her, till he stood by the side of him at whom she gazed?

"Felida!" cried Felix, in a voice of agony.

She started and looked at him—at them both. The contrast was too violent. Her

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eyes were slowly leaving her husband's to seek Hugh's, when the latter found himself abruptly shouldered out of the way by the doctor's powerful hand.

"You must go away," he said in his ear; "do you hear? For Felida's sake and his you must go away. Here are your tools," and he thrust them into his hand.

"And I may not even say good-bye?" said Hugh indignantly, as he found himself hurried along the path at express speed.

"No, you may not," said the doctor. "Have you not done mischief enough already?—harm enough? You must not even look back."

But at the postern gate Hugh turned.

There stood the girl, her white face turned towards him, her eyes following him, and on the ground before her a man who clasped her knees.

The door closed softly. Hugh was gone.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

"She said, 'I had rather have a kiss.
Childe Waters, of thy mouth,
Than I would have Cheshire and Lancashire both,
That lie by north and south.'"

"You is very *ugly*, Dosia!" said a passionate little voice through the shut schoolroom door outside which a young man was standing with bent head, listening for a favourable chance to go in.

"Some people don't think so," said Dosia.

"Oh! ugly people always admires ugly people," said the first voice in a tone of immense contempt. And then Hugh, thinking Dosia was going to be schoolmistress for ever, boldly opened the door, and walked in.

Dosia was sitting with her back to him,

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and it was just as straight, and the poise of her head as proud, as if she had not been racked through all the long hours of the past night by torture and jealous doubt. But all the same, when Mademoiselle, who was the sort of person to lie down in the road and let the clouds roll by, kept her room with a sick headache, the girl stepped into the breach, and after breakfast promptly sat as many of the youngsters as she could catch, down to lessons.

Perhaps, too, she thought there was safety in numbers, in case Hugh, after his unavailing efforts to obtain an interview with her last night, should come over this morning, and make another attempt to see her. But when she heard those firm, masterful steps coming up behind her, she trembled with a sudden sense of how puerile a girl's artifice is against a strong man's determination, and the words of the lesson she had begun to read out, died on her lips.

"Children," he said, as the youngsters,

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scenting a holiday, gave him delighted greeting (Onny was luckily absent), "you can go and play. I want to talk to Dosia."

A scattering of books, a pushing back of chairs, a clattering of sturdy little feet, a rush of voices, a door left wide open, and the room was clear.

Dosia leant her elbow on her hand, looking down at the ruled copy-book before her.

Hugh kneeled down beside her, and so got a good look into her face, which was pale, and all the sweeter for its pallor, despite the touch of sternness about her closed lips, and the coldness of the eyes she slowly lifted to his.

So close were they that they looked, as it were, through clear wells into each other's souls; and then Hugh said:

"Don't you believe me, dear?"

Like the ripple made by the wind on water, there came a change in Dosia's questioning, eager regard; it wavered, fell back, then rallied to gaze again.

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"Hugh," she said, "do you think you have behaved honourably by me—and that poor girl?"

No answer, but Hugh's eyes were honourable, if ever a man's were.

"Could you not have told me about it—if it were only an innocent idyll, and no harm in it?"

No answer, only Hugh's arm went round the girl. He held her fast, though he did not venture to draw her towards him.

"Onny!" she said faintly, with an anxious glance at the window. "And did you think it a proper thing, to keep me waiting while you talked to *her?*"

Hugh bent his head, and kissed the little fist so inexorably doubled up on her knee.

"And—and you admire dark people," said Dosia, a little confused and disarmed by these tactics of the enemy.

"Yes. But I *love* a fair one," said Hugh, mumbling her little hand with kisses.

"And—and—what would you have said if

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you had found me sitting on a young man's knee? Would you have believed such a monstrous" (she tried to get her hand away, and her eyes sparkled) "impossible story as that I had *fallen asleep?*"

"I should have killed him outright," said Hugh, "and put you on my own knee. And then I should have asked you for an explanation."

"And you would have *believed* what I told you?"

Hugh's other arm, sweeping the school-books from the table, had gone round Dosia's waist now, and from that strait prison, in which she blushed and trembled, he forced her to look him full in the face.

"Yes," he said deliberately, "I should have believed you. And I shall make you believe me too in time—if I do not leave you, and if I tell you at least once in every hour in the twenty-four. And I think I am very forgiving. Remember it was you who choked *me* off, when I came down here hot-foot for your

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answer, and, like the fickle, inconstant little jade that you are, put me such miles away from you that I could never get near enough to bring you to book."

"So you went for consolation elsewhere," she said, trying to free herself. "And she was very pretty," she added, swallowing something hard.

"No—not pretty, but a pleasant little soul," he said, "who let me talk to my heart's content, and who was always good-tempered when a certain other person——"

"And she was very fond of you?" said Dosia, still fighting against the pricks.

"Not a bit. You see she knew she was married—and I suppose felt a perfect matron. To be sure she did call me a boy sometimes. And she will settle down as happily as possible with that poor Felix"—he paused—"after a bit."

"Hugh," said Dosia, in a whisper, "did you ever—ever—kiss her—as a friend, you know?"

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"Dosia, did you ever—ever kiss one of your many lovers, as a friend, you know?"

Dosia disdained to answer, only tried with all her strength to unlock the hands round her waist.

"Now," he said, "don't hurt your soft little fingers, and it's no good. I've got you now, and I mean to keep you."

"No," she said, very low, "for you have not got my spirit yet. Hugh," she said suddenly, and the look, the love were so true, and sweet, and womanly, that no man could have doubted her goodness then, "if I married you, and you became like most of the husbands I have seen, it would break me up; I should go to moral ruin—to the dogs, as you men call it—and if there could not be true sympathy of heart and mind and tastes between us, and, best of all, *faithfulness* in all things, I would rather part with you now, now with your dear arms round me—for I love you, Hugh!—Oh! I love you——"

"Little darling," said Hugh rapturously.

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"—than that we should come to unlove each other, and hate to be bound together. Won't you get tired of me, Hugh?" she said wistfully, and laying her two hands on his shoulders. "I am only a girl, and men have so much in their lives—so much——"

But Hugh's arms had wound themselves closer round her, and his head had fallen forward on her shoulder, so that she could not see his face.

Something more than mere love was in this man's heart then. . . he was taking a sacred vow unto himself that this girl, with her pure and lofty ideals (the very sort that when once put wrong is so much more likely to come a cropper in life than she who has never aspired to anything, and therefore can never fall), should not be disillusioned by him, but that he would love her, cling to her, make her happy with all his poor strength, to his life's end.

There were tears in his eyes when he lifted his head, and suddenly clasped both her arms round his neck.

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"Kiss me, Dosia, before Onny comes—I hear his voice—kiss me."

A shower of white rose petals fell through the open window, scattering their perfume as they lay. All her life long that breath mingled with Dosia's memory of the moment. . . . . And Onny arrived just too late.

THE END.

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